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NBA | Page 5

Harden scores 50-point triple-double in Rockets victory

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Saturday, December 15, 2018
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GULF TIMES SPORT

FOOTBALL

Trophies matter, says Mourinho ahead of Liverpool clash

Page 3

SECOND TEST

Australia happy after day one despite India fightback

Indian bowlers strike after a century partnership by Harris and Finch as hosts post 277 for six at stumps in Perth

AFP
Perth, Australia

Australia were pleased with their overall position at the end of the first day of the second Test against India yesterday, despite several top order batsmen failing to capitalise on promising starts in Perth.

A century opening partnership after captain Tim Paine won the toss and elected to bat appeared to lay the foundation for a sizeable total on a challenging pitch at Test cricket's newest venue, but openers Marcus Harris and Aaron Finch were among a number of top order players who couldn't build the big individual score Australia craved.

At stumps on a scorching day, the home side were 277 for six, with Tim Paine on 16 and Pat Cummins on 11, a crowd of 20,746 braving the heat to be part of history on the first day of Test cricket at the new Optus Stadium.

Finch, who made 50 at the top of the order to ease some of the pressure on his spot in the team, said the Australians were satisfied with their work given the conditions.

"I thought we batted really well today," he said, adding that the wicket presented "some challenges".

"The position we are in, we would have taken that at the start of the day," he said.

India dropped two catches and ended the day with concerns of their own.

Paceman Ishant Sharma briefly left the field late in the day with what team officials said was cramp, and their batsmen would have been slightly alarmed by some of the variable bounce.

Recalled batsman Hanuma Vihari, who picked up two important wickets with his part-time spin including a sharply rising delivery which removed Harris, admitted it was impossible to ignore the variable bounce but that their batsmen would not be concerned by it.



India's Hanuma Vihari (second from right) celebrates with teammates after dismissing Australia's Marcus Harris (right) on the first day of the second Test in Perth yesterday. (AFP)

Vihari said the game was evenly poised heading into the second day.

"The first hour tomorrow is crucial," he said.

"If we can get them out for less than 320 we are back in the game."

"The important thing for us is

no to think about those aspects (bounce) too much."

Four Australian batsmen made over 40, but none went on to post a substantial innings.

Second-gamer Harris led the way with 70, Finch made 50,

Travis Head hit 58 before throwing his wicket away and local fa-

vourite Shaun Marsh made 45.

3 wickets lost for 22

Australia started very well, with Harris and the under-pressure opener Finch putting on 112 for the first wicket.

Despite the pitch having a distinctly green tinge that appealed

to a rare four-pronged Indian pace attack, the pair backed their captain's call at the toss until Finch's luck ran out and he was trapped in front by paceman Jasprit Bumrah (1-41).

Finch's dismissal brought struggling left-hander Usman Khawaja to the wicket and he

made just five, sparring at a short ball from Umesh Yadav and getting a thick edge to wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant.

Harris was dropped at second slip from the bowling of Mohamed Shami on 60, he but added just 10 more before falling to Vihari (2-53). Vihari got a ball to rise sharply

Scorecard

AUSTRALIA 1st innings	
M. Harris c Rahane b Vihari	70
A. Finch lbw Bumrah	50
U. Khawaja c Pant b Yadav	5
S. Marsh c Rahane b Vihari	45
P. Handscomb c Kohli b Sharma	7
T. Head c Shami b Sharma	58
T. Paine not out	16
P. Cummins not out	11
Extras (b4, lb3, nb1, w7)	15
Total (for 6 wickets; 90 overs)	277
Fall of wickets: 1-112 (Finch), 2-130 (Khawaja), 3-134 (Harris), 4-148 (Handscomb), 5-232 (Marsh), 6-251 (Head)	
Bowling: Sharma 16-7-35-2 (nb1), Bumrah 22-8-41-1, Yadav 18-2-68-1 (1w), Shami 19-3-63-0 (1w), Vihari 14-1-53-2, Vijay 1-0-10-0	

off the pitch and it followed Harris as he recoiled, fending it to Ajinkya Rahane at first slip.

Harris had been there for 141 balls, but his dismissal meant Australia had lost three wickets for just 22 runs and surrendered their early advantage.

Australia slumped to 148 for four when Peter Handscomb (7) again fell against a short ball outside off stump, Indian skipper Virat Kohli pulling down a scintillating one-handed catch in slips from the bowling of Sharma (2-35).

Marsh, dropped by Pant on 24 from the bowling of Vihari, and Head steadied the ship with an 84-run stand.

However, Marsh became Vihari's second victim, caught at first slip by Ajinkya Rahane.

Head was growing in confidence and was eyeing his first Test century until a rush of blood saw him lash out at a wide delivery from Ishant and slice it straight to Mohammed Shami on the third man boundary.

India won the first Test in Adelaide by 31 runs as they seek their first series victory on Australian soil.

MOTORSPORT

Al-Sulaiti, al-Khelaifi grab Qatar Superstock and QTCC poles again

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Defending Qatar Superstock 600 champion, Qatar's Saeed al-Sulaiti, grabbed the pole position of the round 2 at Losail International Circuit, and so did the double winner of the last Qatar Touring Car Championship round, Abdulla al-Khelaifi.

Al-Sulaiti was on top in the two free practice sessions, and managed to do the fastest lap in the Superpole in 2:04.024 to lock the first spot in the grid ahead of Abdulla al-Qubaisi.

"In the Superpole, my lap time was very good but in the last three minutes, I went for the last lap and in the first sector I was even faster but unfortunately, I

lost the front in corner 6, but the crash was small. I feel good with the bike for the race and ready for tomorrow as the pain in the toe due to last weekend crash decreased and I feel much better," said al-Sulaiti.

Mishal al-Naimi and Nasser al-Malki will start in third and fourth place respectively.

In the QSTK Trophy, the fastest rider was Qatar's Sheikh Jassim al-Thani with a lap time of 2:08.122. Kuwaiti riders Mohammed al-Zaidan and Ali Abdulhussein finished second and third respectively.

"I am again the fastest rider in the QSTK Trophy category and hopefully tomorrow I can have a good start because the front riders have better starts than me. I always follow them behind and this time I will try to keep the



Qatar's Saeed al-Sulaiti (left) and Abdulla al-Sulaiti in action during the qualifying session for the Qatar Superstock 600 at Losail International Circuit yesterday.

best acceleration I can until the end," Sheikh Jassim said.

In the Qatar Touring Car Championship, al-Khelaifi was on pole again with a lap time of 2:23.037.

Al-Khelaifi was very satisfied with the results of the day. "I am very happy with today's timings. It's the best qualifying I ever had, best qualifying of the category. Still there is some time in the car



Qatar's Abdulla al-Khelaifi in action during the qualifying session for the Qatar Touring Car Championships yesterday.

and I think that tomorrow I can go even faster. The competition is getting stronger in each round and I have to build a bigger gap if I want to stay away from (Ahmed) al-Asiri."

Newcomer driver, al-Asiri will start second on the grid as he managed to clock the time during the Qualifying time at 2:25.373.

"The car is a little bit better to-

day. Abdulla was amazing today and he got away from all of us. I don't think I can manage to get 1.5 seconds to beat him tomorrow but I will try my best," al-Asiri said.

Ibrahim al-Abdulghani had some problems with his car in the opening round and didn't manage to get a good result but this weekend, he finished in third in the qualifying session with a time of 2:25.830.

Today, QSTK Race 1 starts at 11:30 and Race 2 at 14:30. For QTCC, the first race is scheduled at 13:00 and the second race at 16:00.

Qatar Superstock 600 and Qatar Touring Car Championship are organised by Losail Circuit Sports Club and Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation with Pirelli Qatar as sponsor.

FOCUS

Bangladesh cruise to 2-1 series victory over West Indies

Shai Hope scoring his second straight ton of the series in a losing cause in Sylhet



Bangladesh players pose with the tournament trophy after winning the third one-day international against West Indies in Sylhet, Bangladesh, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Sylhet, Bangladesh

Tamim Iqbal and Soumya Sarkar slammed half-centuries as Bangladesh cruised to an eight-wicket win over the West Indies in the third and final one-day international to take the three-match series 2-1 yesterday.

Tamim hit an unbeaten 81 in the northeastern city of Sylhet while Soumya added 80 off 81 balls to guide Bangladesh to 202-2 in 38.3 overs after Mehidy Hasan's career best 4-29 helped the home side restrict the West Indies to 198-8 in 50 overs.

Shai Hope fought a lone battle for the tourists, scoring his second successive hundred of the series but it was in vain as no other batsman provided support.

Fresh from an unbeaten 146 off 144 balls in the previous match, Hope struck another unconquered knock of 108 off 131 to prop up the visitors, taking

WEST INDIES		Extras (lb 1, lb 4, w6, p5) 16		L. Das c Powell b Paul 23	
C. Hemraj c Mithun b Hasan	9	Total (9 wks, 50 overs) 198		S. Sarkar b Paul	80
S. Hope not out	108	FoW: 1-15 (Hemraj), 2-57 (Bravo), 3-96 (Samuels), 4-97 (Hetmyer), 5-99 (Powell), 6-133 (Chase) 7-143 (Allen), 8-171 (Paul), 9-177 (Roach)		M. Rahim not out	16
D. Bravo b Hasan	10	Bowling: Rahman 10-1-33-0 (w2), Hasan 10-1-29-4, Shakib 9-0-40-2, Mortaza 9-1-34-2, Saifuddin 9-0-38-1 (w1), Mahmudullah 3-0-14-0 (w3)		Extras (wl, nb 1) 2	
M. Samuels b Saifuddin	19	BANGLADESH:		Total (two wickets; 38.3 overs) 202	
S. Hetmyer lbw b Hasan	0	T. Iqbal not out	81	FoW: 1-45 (Das), 2-176 (Sarkar)	
R. Powell c Rahim b Hasan	1			Bowling: Roach 3-0-16-0, Chase 8-0-32-0, Paul 7-0-38-2, Samuels 4-0-25-0 (w1), Bishoo 9-0-48-0 (nb1), Allen 4-0-22-0, Powell 3.3-0-21-0	
R. Chase c Sarkar b Shakib	8			RESULT: Bangladesh won by eight wickets	
F. Allen c Mithun b Shakib	6				
K. Paul b Mortaza	12				
K. Roach lbw b Mortaza	3				
D. Bishoo not out	6				

his tally in the series to 297 runs. Bangladesh made a steady response, with Tamim and Liton Das hitting 45 runs for the opening wicket before Liton offered a catch to Rovman Powell at mid-on off Keemo Paul.

Soumya and Tamim denied the West Indies any momentum, putting 131 runs in their second wicket stand, which all but

sealed the contest and the series. Soumya was the aggressor-in-chief, smashing five sixes and as many fours before Paul sent his leg-stump cartwheeling.

Tamim, who happily anchored the innings, sealed the game with successive fours off Powell, his eighth and ninth boundary of the innings.

Mushfiqur Rahim was un-

beaten on 16 at the other end. Earlier, skipper Mashrafe Mortaza and spinner Shakib Al Hasan claimed two wickets each after man-of-the-match Mehidy rattled the West Indies' top-order.

"It was a good match - Hope played an excellent innings," Mashrafe said after the match.

"Our bowlers have been very

good. Spinners have been tight and pacers also stuck to the plans," he added.

TWENTY20S TO COME

Earlier, Hope defied the spirited Bangladesh attack, hitting Shakib over the long off to bring up his fourth ODI century after the ninth wicket had fallen for 177 runs.

The opener, who was named player of the series, also hit 10 fours in his fine innings.

"Still a bit dizzy to be honest, but I've hung in there. Obviously wanted my team to get over the line, but very unfortunate for the guys to not take it till the end and hopefully we will learn from our mistakes," said Hope.

Bangladesh won the first match by five wickets on Sunday before the West Indies levelled the series with four-wicket win in the second match two days later.

The West Indies will wrap up their tour with three Twenty20 internationals, with the opening match scheduled at the same venue on Monday.

U19 WORLD CUP ASIA DIV TWO QUALIFIER

Agarwal shines as Qatar see off Bhutan

By A Correspondent
Bangkok

Leg-spinner Shubb Agarwal claimed six for six in six overs as Qatar saw off Bhutan by seven wickets in their Under-19 World Cup Asia Division Two qualifier in a lopsided match here yesterday.

Bhutan, who elected to bat first, were dismissed for a paltry 58 in 22 overs with opener G K Ghalley top-scoring with 23.

None of the other batsmen made it into double figures and four of them were dismissed for

nought as Agarwal weaved his magic, giving Qatar their second win in three matches.

Samil Sadiq also excelled for Qatar, taking three wickets for 20 runs in eight overs.

In reply, openers Solaiman Mohamed and captain Hussain Khan gave Qatar a solid start by putting on 41 runs.

Solaiman made 23 and Khan 30 before being dismissed, but Syed Tameem saw them through with a 21-ball 12 as Qatar made 62 for 3 with 230 balls to spare.

Agarwal was adjudged man of the match.

SELECTION

Sri Lanka's Malinga back as one-day, Twenty20 skipper

AFP
Colombo

Sri Lanka yesterday brought back Lasith Malinga after a long hiatus as captain of its limited-over squads to lead the national team against New Zealand.

Sri Lanka Cricket said the 35-year-old right-arm fast bowler was named skipper of a 17-man squad for three one-day internationals and one T20 starting January 3.

Malinga led Sri Lanka to the T20 World Cup in 2014. But since captaining Sri Lanka against the UAE in February 2016, he has not led the national team.

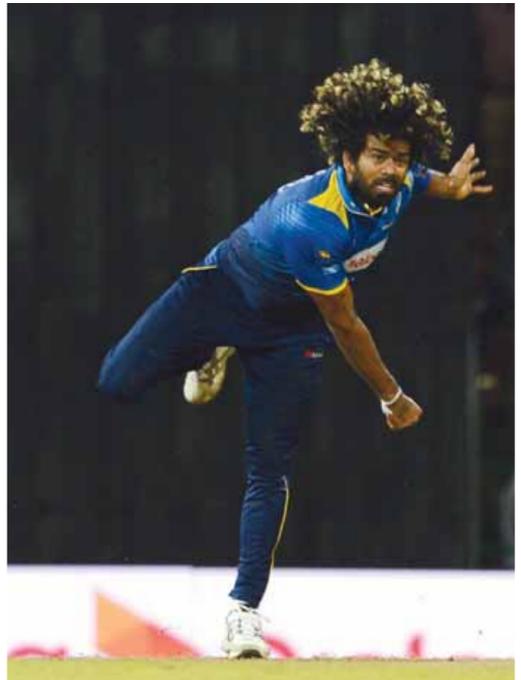
He had lost his captaincy as well as his place in the team after recurring injuries which forced him to sit out many tournaments.

However, he captained an ODI match against India in August last year.

The latest squad for the shorter forms of the game was ratified by President Maithripala Sirisena in the absence of a sports minister, the cricket board said.

Sri Lanka is effectively without a government since a disputed cabinet appointed by Sirisena was defeated in a no-confidence motion last month.

SQUAD: Lasith Malinga (Captain), Niroshan Dickwella (VCaptain), Angelo Mathews, Danushka Gunathilaka, Kusal Janith Perera, Dinesh Chandimal, Asela Gunaratne, Kusal Mendis, Dhananjaya de Silva, Thisara Perera, Dasun Shanaka, Lakshan Sandakan, Seekkuge Prasanna, Dushmantha Chameera, Kasun Rajitha, Nuwan Pradeep and Lahiru Kumara.



SPOTLIGHT

Sri Lanka reeling from upheaval ahead of NZ Tests

AFP
Wellington

Sri Lanka will hope to put poor form and off-field chaos behind them when they face New Zealand in the first Test at Wellington's Basin Reserve today.

The tourists' preparations have been anything but smooth, with changes to their coaching staff increasing pressure on a team coming off a 3-0 Test series whitewash against England last month.

Former England player Jonathan Lewis was named as the side's new batting coach this week, joining Australia's Steve Rixon, who was brought in as fielding coach last week.

Sri Lanka's bowling coach Nuwan Zoysa was suspended by the International Cricket Council in October after he was accused of match-fixing and other "corrupt conduct".

That same month, ex-chief selector and former captain Sanath Jayasuriya was charged for failing to cooperate with a match-fixing probe.

Adding to their woes, off-spinner Akila Dananjaya was



Captain Dinesh Chandimal (second from right) and his men are coming off a 3-0 series whitewash against England last month.

suspended this month for having an illegal bowling action, and the national team's selection panel was sacked over the England series loss.

Opening batsman Dimuth Karunaratne admitted it was difficult to block out the upheaval and focus on the upcoming two-Test series.

"It's not easy, swapping management... but we're going to the same basics and everything,"

he told Wellington's Dominion Post newspaper.

"It's not a matter for us. We're trying to regroup as a team, do our best, and trying to win."

The Sri Lankans, ranked sixth in the world, also have a poor Test record against the Black Caps in New Zealand, winning only two of 17 matches against them.

Fourth-ranked New Zealand enter the series full of confidence after securing their first away Test

series win over Pakistan in 49 years, to give coach Gary Stead a winning start to his tenure.

Stead said he was not taking Sri Lanka lightly and was concerned his players may be drained after wrapping up series against Pakistan in Abu Dhabi last Saturday.

"Some guys are still struggling with jetlag and we going from the extreme conditions of low, slow, turning wickets to probably a hard, fast bouncy Ba-

sin Reserve wicket," he told Radio New Zealand.

"They are all things that are little red flags that we need to be aware of... we're a little more vulnerable than we would normally be."

New Zealand have named a 13-man squad for the series while Sri Lanka have 17 players to choose from, giving them added options with the bat.

The two Test series will be followed by three one-dayers and a single Twenty20 match.

SQUADS

New Zealand: Kane Williamson (capt), Dimuth Karunaratne, Tom Latham, Jeet Raval, Ross Taylor, Henry Nicholls, Colin de Grandhomme, BJ Watling, Will Young, Tim Southee, Matt Henry, Ajaz Patel, Trent Boult, Neil Wagner

Sri Lanka: Dinesh Chandimal (capt), Dimuth Karunaratne, Kusal Mendis, Dhananjaya de Silva, Angelo Mathews, Roshan Silva, Niroshan Dickwella (wk), Danushka Gunathilaka, Lahiru Thirimanne, Sadeera Samarawickrama, Dilruwan Perera, Lakshan Sandakan, Suranga Lakmal, Nuwan Pradeep, Kasun Rajitha, Lahiru Kumara, Dushmantha Chameera.

CHANGE

Giles replaces Strauss as England's new director of cricket

Reuters
London

Former England spinner Ashley Giles has replaced Andrew Strauss as the new Managing Director of England Men's Cricket, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced yesterday.

Giles, who is Sport Director at Warwickshire, will be responsible for building the coaching and management structure to support the England men's cricket teams across all formats.

Former England captain Strauss stepped down from his position in October to support his wife Ruth in her fight against cancer.

Giles played 54 tests for England and later worked as a national selector from 2008-2014.

old said in a statement.

"I am very grateful for the opportunity and excited about working with some talented people. The legacy left by Andrew Strauss has put the performance programme in a stable place."

It marks a comeback to the ECB set-up for Giles, after he was sacked as England's one-day international coach in 2014.

Giles' credentials will be tested over the next 12 months as England host the 50-over World Cup and the Ashes series against Australia.

The appointment follows a month-long recruitment process led by ECB chief executive Tom Harrison.

"Ashley was the standout candidate amongst a very strong field," Harrison said.

"He will bring a fresh perspective to the role and build on the excellent work carried out by Andrew Strauss over the past three and a half years."

EPL

'Trophies matter', says Mourinho ahead of United vs Liverpool clash

Liverpool are top of the Premier League before the weekend round of matches

AFP
Manchester

Jose Mourinho says success is best measured in trophies as he prepares to take his injury-hit Manchester United squad to high-flying Liverpool tomorrow.

Liverpool are top of the Premier League before the weekend round of matches but have yet to win a trophy under the management of Jurgen Klopp, who has been in charge since October 2015.

The 18-times English champions have won just one prize in the past 12 years – the League Cup under Kenny Dalglish in 2012 – despite featuring in two European finals.

Mourinho won the Europa League and FA Cup in his first season at Old Trafford but ended last season empty-handed and his team are lagging 16 points behind Klopp's side in this season's title race.

"I think trophies matter, yeah," said Mourinho. "I think it matters, especially when you have the potential to fight for trophies and when you clearly say the objective is to win the trophies."

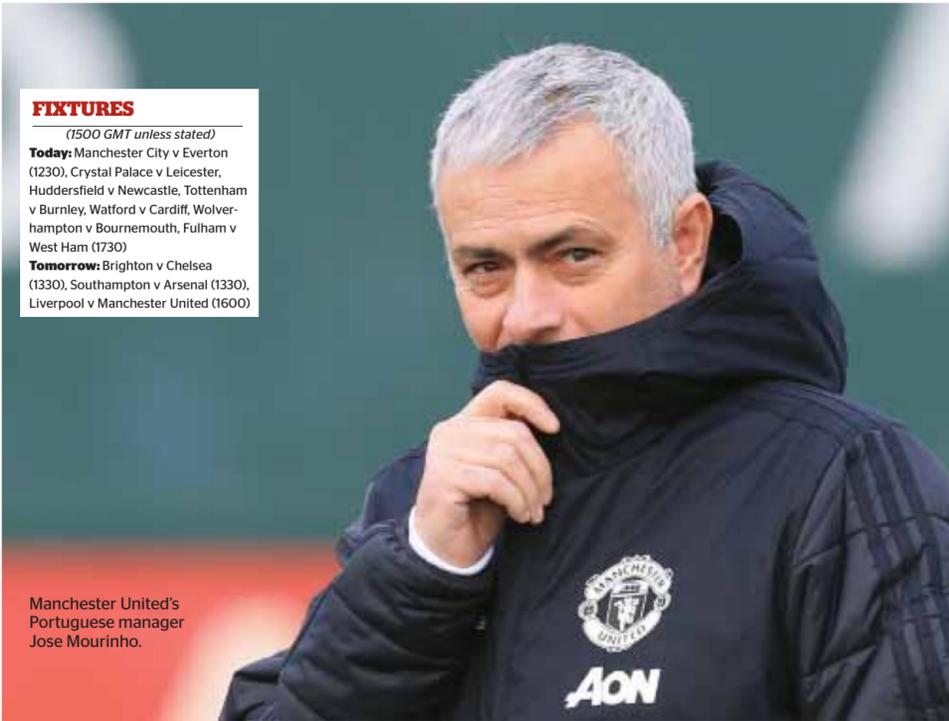
"I think sometimes just to say it is not very intelligent. But when you have the potential you have nothing to hide."

"I don't read much but I think they (Liverpool) have said that their objective is to win the Premier League," he added.

Even though Klopp has yet to win silverware at Anfield, Mourinho acknowledges that the Liverpool manager has built a team in his own image, full of attacking intent.

By contrast, the United manager believes he is still a long way from having a team that reflects the way he wants to play.

"A football team is not just about spending the money," said Mourinho. "A football team is a little bit like a house. A house is not just about buying your furniture. You have to do work on the house and when it's ready you buy the furniture."



FIXTURES	
(1500 GMT unless stated)	
Today:	Manchester City v Everton (1230), Crystal Palace v Leicester, Huddersfield v Newcastle, Tottenham v Burnley, Watford v Cardiff, Wolverhampton v Bournemouth, Fulham v West Ham (1730)
Tomorrow:	Brighton v Chelsea (1330), Southampton v Arsenal (1330), Liverpool v Manchester United (1600)

Manchester United's Portuguese manager Jose Mourinho.

"You spend money on the best possible furniture and then you are ready to live in an amazing house."

Mourinho faces taking a depleted squad to Anfield on Sunday, with several players battling to recover from the injuries that kept them out of Wednesday's Champions League defeat in Valencia.

Defender Victor Lindelof and forward Alexis Sanchez will definitely miss the game as they continue to recover from hamstring injuries.

Anthony Martial, Luke Shaw, Matteo Darmian, Diogo Dalot, Scott McTominay and Marcos Rojo will be assessed to ascertain whether they can return against Liverpool.

Goalkeeper David de Gea and midfielder Nemanja Matic, who were rested against Valencia, will return, but United's manager remains unsure how many players he will have to choose from.

"In Valencia, only De Gea and Matic were available to play and didn't travel by

decision," he said.

"Apart from that, the other players who didn't travel were not fit to play in Valencia. All of them had injuries and they were not ready."

"All of them didn't train yesterday again and today there will be a little introduction to training – I don't want to say test – to see the answer, to see if we can increase it a little bit tomorrow to have them available for Sunday. I hope that some will be available but for sure some will not be."

SPOTLIGHT

Guardiola boosted by timely return of Agüero, De Bruyne

Reuters
Manchester

Manchester City's influential duo Sergio Agüero and Kevin De Bruyne are in contention to face Everton at home in the Premier League today, as they look to rebound from their first domestic defeat of the season last weekend.

City boss Pep Guardiola told a news conference on Friday that both players had come through training this week unscathed and might feature against a side City have not beaten at home in the last two seasons.

"He (Agüero) did the last two training sessions. On Thursday, he trained with the team. He has no pain and we will decide," Guardiola said.

"With KDB (De Bruyne), it is the same case as Sergio – he has no pain but we will see."

Ahead of a packed festive schedule with six games in the space of 20 days, City's squad may be stretched with David Silva, Danilo, Benjamin Mendy and Claudio Bravo all sidelined.

Defender John Stones was forced off in City's 2-1 win over Hoffenheim in the Champions League on Wednesday and his fitness will be assessed ahead of the weekend.

Yet Guardiola said the mounting injury list would not force the club into the transfer market in January.

"No, we are not going to sign anyone," he said of his second-placed side, who sit one point behind unbeaten leaders Liverpool.

They will reclaim top spot for at least 24 hours by securing a point against Everton, with Liverpool playing City's rivals Manchester United tomorrow.

Yet Guardiola was wary of the threat posed by seventh-place Everton, having drawn his last two home matches with the side



now led by the attack-minded coach Marco Silva.

"We make good games but we didn't win, we dropped four points," the Spaniard said.

"Tomorrow is another game, the Everton team has changed completely with (Gylfi) Sigurdsson and Richarlison, (Lucas) Digne and Yerry Mina – it is a top side."

"I'm really impressed with how they have done so far. It will be a tough, tough game..."

Their task will be made easier should the club's record goalscorer Agüero return to the lineup.

The Argentine has been out since the beginning of the month with a muscle injury.

In that time, City have scored seven goals in four matches in all competitions – a relatively modest tally for a side who notched a record 106 strikes in the league last season.

WARNING

Premier League calls on fans to behave

AFP
London

The Premier League published a message to fans yesterday calling on them to support their teams in the right way following recent incidents of abuse that have blighted the game.

Raheem Sterling was subjected to alleged racial abuse during Manchester City's defeat at Chelsea last week.

The England forward later issued a statement accusing the British media of fuelling racism in the way it reports certain stories about black players.

Chelsea banned four supporters pending an investigation and were then forced to condemn anti-Semitic chanting during Thursday's Europa League tie with Vidi in Budapest.

A Tottenham fan was also arrested during the recent north

London derby at Arsenal after a banana skin was thrown onto the pitch in the direction of Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang as he celebrated putting the Gunners ahead. With a packed festive schedule to come, the Premier League has asked for any abuse to be reported.

"Some brilliant football has been played this Premier League season and the vast majority of fans have generated exciting and passionate atmospheres in stadiums," the statement said.

"However, there have been incidents recently where a very small minority have behaved unacceptably."

"As we head into the festive season, with matches coming thick and fast, we ask all supporters to get behind their teams in passionate, positive and respectful ways. Support for a club should never include excessive aggression or discrimination towards the opposition."

PRAISE

Klopp says United have 'unbelievable quality'

AFP
London

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp says Manchester United have "unbelievable quality" despite their struggles this season, playing down his own team's growing injury problems ahead of tomorrow's Premier League clash.

Liverpool are top of the Premier League heading into the weekend fixtures, 16 points ahead of Jose Mourinho's side, but the Klopp is taking nothing for granted.

"I was never interested in the points of Manchester United and I am not today," he said yesterday.

"I am aware of the criticism and stuff but when we analyse them and switch off the sound there is a lot of quality. There is speed, technique, physical strength, pretty much everything."

They still have (David) de Gea in goal, unbelievable. They have strikers they can switch between (Marcus) Rashford, (Romelu) Lukaku, (Jesse) Lingard, (Anthony) Martial, unbelievable quality."

Mourinho has been wrestling with the problem of how to get the best out of mid-

fielder Paul Pogba, who has not been in the starting line-up for the past two Premier League matches.

Klopp was asked whether he thought United were better with or without the World Cup winner but said he would not comment beyond calling him a "world-class player."

He said he is unlikely to make a move during the January transfer window after insisting his mounting injury problems in defence are not a crisis.

Right-back Trent Alexander-Arnold (foot) and Joel Matip (broken collarbone) this week joined Joe Gomez (broken leg)

on the injury list. Midfielder James Milner played at right-back recently and Nathaniel Clyne has returned to fitness but has barely featured since the beginning of last season.

Klopp admits he may have to get creative but that is unlikely to involve spending in January. "A crisis is if you feel it is a crisis," he said. "With Trent, it's not as serious as with the other two boys, but of course it's not top-class news, that's clear." A back problem restricted Clyne to just five appearances in the final few weeks of last season and his injury issues have continued into the current campaign but his return to full training is timely.

LA LIGA

Barca to face demons as Levante host leaders

AFP
Madrid

Barcelona will head to Levante tomorrow night top of La Liga and with a score to settle.

Seven months ago, they were two games away from becoming the first team to finish a Spanish top-flight season unbeaten since Real Madrid in 1932, and even then there were only 18 games in a 10-team division.

It would have been a remarkable feat, a feather in the cap for their coach Ernesto Valverde to help soothe the pain of a quarter-finals exit from the Champions League.

But Levante had other ideas, scoring three times in 10 minutes to lead Barca 5-1 before prevailing 5-4. "We are angry not to have come through this game and to lose the opportunity to finish unbeaten," Valverde said.

On their way to qualifying for the last



Barcelona's Spanish coach Ernesto Valverde.

16 of the Champions League this time, Barcelona drew at home to Tottenham on Tuesday when Valverde took the chance to rest several key players, in-

cluding Lionel Messi, Jordi Alba, Luis Suarez, Gerard Pique and Marc-Andre ter Stegen.

The irony is they will be fresh this

weekend for the same opponent many believed knocked the stuffing out of them last season, three days before their collapse to Roma.

Perhaps Valverde has since heeded accusations he was naive, that he chased the unbeaten season when rotating his players could have helped them go further in Europe.

He has appeared keener to make changes this term and in those games, Barcelona have also dropped points.

Just as Levante tore them to shreds on the break, Barca still look vulnerable against speed too.

Sergio Busquets has been exposed. Gerard Pique has been off the pace.

If La Liga was ordered on fewest goals conceded, Barcelona would sit 13th.

Levante might feel the plan they executed so brilliantly back in May still holds.

The surge away from the relegation zone under Paco Lopez has been maintained and the team currently sit

seventh. Barcelona's vulnerabilities can be more easily shrugged off while they are the league's frontrunners and those around them have problems of their own.

Real Madrid also rested players against CSKA Moscow on Wednesday but lost 3-0 at home, the Russians becoming the fifth side to score three or more against them this season.

And while Ousmane Dembele's sloppiness off the pitch continues to vex Barca, Real have their own unruly attacker in Isco, who was whistled by his own fans during the CSKA defeat and allowed his frustration to boil over.

"What do you want?" he seemed to shout at one point towards the stands. Later, he passed up the captain's armband too. "I tried to give the armband to Isco," said Marcelo. "He told me that I had to give it to Dani Carvajal, why I don't know."

Madrid should have little trouble against their city neighbours Rayo Val-

lecano today, which will be their last league game before setting off for the United Arab Emirates and the Club World Cup.

Atletico Madrid have fewer problems at the back and more up front, where goals, particularly away from home, have been hard to come by.

Barca and Real's troubles are there for Atletico to exploit but if they are three points off the top when their rivals have stumbled, how will they keep pace when they inevitably improve?

Fixtures (times GMT)

Today: Getafe v Real Sociedad (1200), Real Valladolid v Atletico Madrid (1515), Real Madrid v Rayo Vallecano (1730), Eibar v Valencia (1945)

Tomorrow: Sevilla v Girona (1100), Espanyol v Real Betis (1515), Huesca v Villarreal (1730), Levante v Barcelona (1945)

Monday: Alaves v Athletic Bilbao (2000)



EUROPA LEAGUE

Milan out of Europe, Eintracht fans run riot at Lazio

Fortounis' penalty nine minutes from time saw Olympiakos move into second place in Group F ahead of Gennaro Gattuso's Milan



Olympiakos' Greek midfielder Kostas Fortounis (L) celebrates after scoring during their UEFA Europa league match against AC Milan at the Karaiskaki stadium in Piraeus on Thursday night.

AFP
Paris

Olympiakos dumped AC Milan out of the Europa League yesterday after beating the seven-time European champions 3-1 in a pulsating clash in Greece, while Eintracht Frankfurt fans ran riot during the German side's win at Lazio and Celtic made the knockout stages despite losing to Salzburg at Parkhead.

Captain Kostas Fortounis' penalty nine minutes from time saw the Greeks move into second place in Group F ahead of Gennaro Gattuso's Milan, who thought they had squeaked through when Cristian Zapata had pulled a goal back less than two minutes after putting the hosts 2-0 up with a comical own goal. Olympiakos finished level on 10 points with Milan but qualified ahead of the Italians thanks to their superior goal difference

following Milan's 3-1 win over the Greeks in October, and they end the group stage two points behind group winners Real Betis, who drew 0-0 at Dudelange.

"It's a bitter night... We shouldn't have conceded the first goal and it all went south from then on. We should have done better in the group and come to Greece already qualified," said Milan captain Ignazio Abate, who gave away the decisive spot-kick by fouling former Roma player Vasilis Torosidis.

Five Eintracht Frankfurt fans had been arrested in clashes with police in Rome ahead of their dead-rubber Group H match against Lazio as nearly 9,000 Germans swamped the Stadio Olimpico.

Eintracht had already comfortably taken top spot in the group thanks to winning all five of their previous games, while Lazio were also in the last 32 regardless of the result of the match, won 2-1 by the away side as they came

back from a goal down thanks to second-half strikes from Mijat Gacinovic and Sebastien Haller.

However, away fans charged the pitch after Joaquin Correa's 56th-minute opener, and subsequently threw smoke bombs and flares at both Lazio fans and the police. Last year's runners-up Marseille finished bottom of that group after losing 3-1 at home to Apollon Limassol and ending the group stage with just a single point. Celtic looked to be following Old Firm rivals Rangers out of the competition after Steven Gerrard's side fell 1-0 at Rapid Vienna earlier on Thursday, but Tore Reginiussen's equaliser four minutes from time for Rosenborg at RB Leipzig allowed Brendan Rodgers' side to qualify second from Group B, two points ahead of the Bundesliga outfit.

Second-half goals from Munas Dabbur and Fredrik Gulbrandsen meant that Salzburg topped the group with a 100% record after a 2-1 win, while Olivier Ntcham's

stoppage-time penalty meant nothing for the result nor the final standings.

"There will be things from a performance perspective that we can go away and look at," said Rodgers.

"But the campaign ended tonight in terms of the qualification and we're through which is an absolutely huge effort from everyone."

Earlier Rangers, who had to win at Rapid Vienna in their final group game in order to qualify for the last 32, finished third in Group G after losing 1-0 to group winners Rapid, Dejan Ljubicic sealing the points in the 84th minute.

The Austrians are through to the knockout stages, level on 10 points with group winners Villarreal. Chelsea, who had already won Group L, looked to be on their way to a perfect sixth win from six, but could only scrape a point at eliminated Vidi thanks to substitute Olivier Giroud's late

free-kick, after an Ethan Ampadu own goal and Loic Nego's sumptuous volley had put the hosts a goal ahead.

Qualifiers from the Europa League group stage:

Bayer Leverkusen (GER), FC Zurich (SUI), Salzburg (AUT), Celtic (SCO), Zenit St Petersburg (RUS), Slavia Prague (CZE), Dinamo Zagreb (CRO), Fenerbahce (TUR), Arsenal (ENG), Sporting Lisbon (POR), Real Betis (ESP), Olympiakos (GRE), Villarreal (ESP), Rapid Vienna (AUT), Eintracht Frankfurt (GER), Lazio (ITA), Genk (BEL), Malmo (SWE), Sevilla (ESP), Krasnodar (RUS), Dynamo Kiev (UKR), Rennes (FRA), Chelsea (ENG), BATE Borisov (BLR)

Qualifiers from third-place Champions League group-stage finishes:

Club Brugge (BEL), Inter Milan (ITA), Napoli (ITA), Galatasaray (TUR), Benfica (POR), Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR), Viktoria Plzen (CZE), Valencia (ESP)

SERIE A

Juventus tackle Torino as Italy's elite reel after Euro maulings



Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo reacts during their UEFA Champions League group H football match against Young Boys at the Stade de Suisse stadium on December 12.

AFP
Milan

Champions Juventus tackle city rivals Torino with pride at stake as Italy's top teams return to the home comforts of Serie A this weekend licking their wounds after a bruising week in Europe.

Juventus travel cross-town to the Stadio Olimpico looking to maintain their eight-point advantage at the top of Serie A after their year-long unbeaten record away from home ended with a shock 2-1 Champions League defeat by Young Boys in Bern.

Cristiano Ronaldo and his teammates' pride took a knock in Switzerland but the defeat was ultimately painless as Juventus still won their group ahead of Manchester United who lost 2-1 in Valencia.

Both Napoli and Inter Milan crashed out of the elite European competition as Roma — already through to the knock-out rounds — fell 2-1 at Viktoria Plzen.

AC Milan were eliminated from the Europa League with a 3-1 loss to Greek club Olympiakos, as Lazio were beaten 2-1 by Germany's Eintracht Frankfurt, but still advanced to the last 32.

All want to get back on track in the first of four games in the run-up to the end of the year.

"I've realised that there are two games Juventus refuse to lose — against Inter Milan and Torino," said Ronaldo.

The 33-year-old tasted victory in his first 'Derby d'Italia' against Inter last weekend with Mario Mandzukic scoring the only goal.

And next up is the 'Derby della Mole' against Torino which Juventus have not lost since April 2015.

"A derby is always beautiful and we have to win," warned the former five-time Ballon d'Or winner.

Captain Giorgio Chiellini was rested this week in preparation for Torino, who are sixth, but just four points off the Champions League places.

Walter Mazzarri's side held AC Milan to a goalless draw at the San Siro last weekend.

"Torino have improved a lot," said Chiellini, "they can aim for Europe and they can certainly

cause us problems?"

Carlo Ancelotti's Napoli head for Sardinia to play Cagliari after a dramatic 1-0 defeat at Liverpool.

"Going out like this hurts, but we have to pick ourselves up and focus on the trip to Cagliari," said captain Marek Hamsik whose side visit Inter Milan on Boxing Day.

Both Inter Milan and Roma have struggled in recent weeks.

Luciano Spalletti's Inter had been on a seven-match winning streak at the start of November.

But four points in as many games has seen Inter drop 14 points behind Juventus.

And they crashed out of the Champions League after being held 1-1 at home by PSV Eindhoven.

Goalkeeper Samir Handanovic warned that a victory at home, even against relegation-threatened Udinese, would give the club a boost.

"Winning is the best medicine in situations like this," said the Slovenian goalkeeper.

"We need to find that spark again."

The team have been hit by the absence of Belgian ace Radja Nainggolan with an ankle injury, with fellow midfielder Mattias Vecino also sidelined in recent games.

Spalletti's future is also in doubt with the appointment of former Juventus CEO Giuseppe Marotta as Inter's new general manager on Thursday.

Marotta worked with former Chelsea manager Antonio Conte at Juventus, winning three Serie A titles together.

The pressure is also on Roma coach Eusebio Di Francesco.

Nothing seems to be going right for the capital side, who are down in eighth and host Genoa before next week's trip to Juventus.

Fixtures (all times GMT)

Today: Inter Milan v Udinese (1700), Torino v Juventus (1930)

Tomorrow: SPAL v Chievo (1130), Fiorentina v Empoli, Frosinone v Sassuolo, Sampdoria v Parma (1400), Cagliari v Napoli (1700), Roma v Genoa (1930)

Monday: Atalanta v Lazio (1930)

Tuesday: Bologna v AC Milan (1930)

BOTTOMLINE

Dortmund on target to finish 2018 as 'Autumn champs'

AFP
Berlin

Borussia Dortmund can take a significant first step towards breaking Bayern Munich's stranglehold on the Bundesliga title by beating Werder Bremen today to become 'Herbstmeister', or autumn champions.

Dortmund are seven points clear in the table and a home win over Bremen at Signal Iduna Park will confirm them as the top side in the first half of the Bundesliga season which ends when the winter break starts on December 23.

The unofficial title carries neither a trophy nor prize money, but 38 of the last 55 Herbstmeisters went on to become German champions.

More significantly for the Bundesliga, Dortmund are set to finally break Bayern's monopoly on the honorary title

they have won for each of the last seven seasons.

Dortmund are on a five-match Bundesliga winning streak and coach Lucien Favre said he was more interested in picking up a maximum nine points from their strenuous schedule of three league games in just six days than winning the title of autumn champions in his first season at Dortmund.

After hosting Bremen, Dortmund travel to bottom side Fortuna Duesseldorf on Tuesday, then host second-placed Borussia Moenchengladbach a week on Friday in a tough finish to 2018.

"We have three games in six days and it doesn't do much good to talk about anything else other than our next match — full focus on Bremen," said Favre tersely, when asked what it would mean to be autumn champions in his first season at Dortmund.

The club's sports director Michael Zorc continued

the theme, saying: "It's a title which has no meaning and we haven't achieved it yet, so it's not something which currently concerns us."

Of more pressing concern is the fact midfielder Nuri Sahin, a product of Dortmund's academy who joined Werder in August, has been giving Bremen tips on how to beat the leaders.

"Of course we have talked about Dortmund," Bremen coach Florian Kohfeldt said with a grin.

The midfielder's return to Signal Iduna Park also gives Dortmund a chance to bid farewell to the 30-year-old who spent nine seasons with them and won the 2011 Bundesliga title.

"He well deserves it and we will use the opportunity to say goodbye on Saturday," added Zorc.

Favre made 10 changes from the team which beat Schalke 2-1 away last Saturday in the Bundesliga from the side which

won 2-0 at Monaco on Tuesday in the Champions League and a raft of changes are expected again.

In-form stars like club captain Marco Reus, striker Paco Alcacer, wingers Jacob Bruun Larsen and Jadon Sancho are expected to face Bremen.

Fresh from their thrilling 3-3 draw at Ajax, which confirmed their passage into the last 16 of the Champions League as group winners, third-placed Bayern are at second-from-bottom Hanover today again looking to close the nine-point gap behind Dortmund.

The defending champions have stopped rotating their squad, but Thiago Alcantara, who won a penalty at Ajax, and Kingsley Coman, who scored Bayern's third goal off the bench, are both pushing for starting places following injury.

Second-placed Borussia Moenchengladbach are without four key players at Hoffenheim, where they need a win to

stay in the title race and stay two points ahead of Bayern, but trail Dortmund by seven.

Swiss midfielder Denis Zakaria is suspended after a fifth yellow card this season while the key trio of Christoph Kramer, Matthias Ginter and Jonas Hoffmann are all injured.

"Hoffenheim are one of the top teams in Germany, but we will travel there with confidence," said Gladbach coach Dieter Hecking.

"Now other players have their chance to face a strong opponent."

Fixtures (all times 1430 GMT unless stated)

Today: Hoffenheim v Borussia Moenchengladbach, Stuttgart v Hertha Berlin, Augsburg v Schalke, Hanover 96 v Bayern Munich, Fortuna Duesseldorf v Freiburg, Borussia Dortmund v Werder Bremen (1730)

Tomorrow: RB Leipzig v Mainz, Eintracht Frankfurt v Bayer Leverkusen (1700)

SPOTLIGHT

Salah in line to keep African Player of the Year award

AFP
Johannesburg

Title-holder Mohamed Salah of Egypt was among 10 African stars named yesterday in a Premier League-dominated short-list for the 2018 CAF Player of the Year award.

The 26-year-old scored 44 goals for Liverpool in all competitions last season, his first at Anfield after moving from Roma, and is set to be voted number one in Africa again.

After a slow start to his second season in England, Salah is joint leading Premier League scorer on 10 goals with Gabonese Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang of

Arsenal. Salah and 2015 African Player of the Year Aubameyang are among five nominees from England's top flight, with Manchester City winger Algerian winger Riyad Mahrez, who won the award in 2016 after helping Leicester City to a historic Premier League title, joining them.

Salah's Senegalese Liverpool team-mate Sadio Mane, and Nigerian Alex Iwobi of Arsenal are the other candidates from the most-watched football league in the world. There are two goalkeepers vying to become the first to win the award since Badou Zaki of Morocco 32 years ago — Cameroonian Andre Onana of Ajax Amsterdam and Ugandan Denis Onyango from South African club Mamelodi Sundowns.

NBA

Harden's 50-point triple-double in Rockets victory

'Honestly, we're in a hole right now. You look at the standings, we're in the 14th spot - it's kind of depressing. But we've got to figure it out. We continue to fight our way through it'

AFP
Los Angeles

James Harden's monster 50-point triple-double powered the Houston Rockets to a 126-111 NBA victory over LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers on Thursday.

Harden, the reigning NBA Most Valuable player, added 11 assists and 10 rebounds for his second triple-double of the season and his second 50-point game of what has been a frustrating campaign for the Rockets so far.

Houston led the league last season with 65 regular-season wins, but came into the contest next-to-last in the Western Conference. They gained a spot as they continued to claw their way back toward .500, improving to 13-14.

"Honestly, we're in a hole right now," Harden said. "You look at the standings, we're in the 14th spot - it's kind of depressing. But we've got to figure it out. We continue to fight our way through it."

Harden said early-season injuries and the addition of new players contributed to the shaky start to the season, but he remained confident the Rockets can be a force in the West.

"I just believe and trust in all my guys," he said. "We'll continue to build."

Harden scored 11 points in the fourth quarter, when the Rockets - who led 90-88 through three periods - finally pulled away in a game that featured 13 lead changes and was tied 12 times.

He pulled down his 10th rebound with less than 90 seconds remaining for the 37th triple-double of his career. He has produced four of the 13 50-point triple-doubles ever recorded in the league.

Chris Paul added 14 points and nine assists, Clint Capela chipped in 16 points and 14 rebounds and Daniel House added 15 points off the bench for the Rockets.

James led the Lakers with 29 points and Kyle Kuzma added 24, but the Lakers saw a two-game winning streak end.

The San Antonio Spurs continued their rise up the Western Conference rankings with a fourth straight victory, 125-87 over the Los Angeles Clippers.

LaMarcus Aldridge scored 27 points, connecting on 12 of 14 shots. That included his first three-pointer of the season. Rudy Gay scored 21 points and DeMar DeRozan and Marco Belinelli added 14 apiece as six Spurs players scored in double figures.

It was the Spurs' biggest win of the season and gave them four wins in four games of their current six-game home-stand. They had arrived back in Texas having lost two on the road to fall three games under .500 for the first time in two decades.

"We had a lot of games on the road and that kind of caught up with us," Aldridge said. "Coming home, guys wanted to recharge and take care of this home stand."

The Phoenix Suns took care of business at home, downing Dallas 99-89 to spoil the season debut of Mavericks icon Dirk Nowitzki.

Nowitzki, who had ankle surgery in April, became the first player in NBA his-



Houston Rockets guard James Harden (right) celebrates with guard Chris Paul after scoring a basket during the fourth quarter against the Los Angeles Lakers at Toyota Center. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

tory to suit up for 21 seasons for the same team when he came into the game in the first quarter.

He played just over six minutes and scored two points - banking in a jump shot on his first attempt of the night.

Mavs coach Rick Carlisle said the team were "thrilled" to have Nowitzki back on the floor, but the lowly Suns spoiled the party, snapping a 10-game losing streak.

T.J. Warren led Phoenix with 30 points. Jamal Crawford added 17 off the

RESULTS			
Phoenix	99-89	Dallas	
Orlando	97-91	Chicago	
San Antonio	125-87	Clippers	
Houston	126-111	Lakers	

bench and fellow reserve Josh Jackson contributed 14.

Harrison Barnes led the Mavericks with 15 points, but Dallas were undone by

23 turnovers. A trip south of the border proved fruitful for the Orlando Magic, who ended a three-game skid with a 97-91 victory over the Chicago Bulls in Mexico City. Center Nikola Vucevic scored 26 points and pulled down 10 rebounds for the Magic, who trailed by four points with 7:35 remaining.

Vucevic scored 10 points in the fourth quarter as the Magic secured the victory in front of a crowd of 20,021 at Arena Ciudad de Mexico.

NHL

Morrissey's winner leads Jets over Oilers

Reuters
Winnipeg

Josh Morrissey scored 41 seconds into overtime, and Mark Scheifele collected one goal and two assists as the host Winnipeg Jets erased a third-period deficit to beat the Edmonton Oilers 5-4 in an exciting back-and-forth affair Thursday night.

Goalie Connor Hellebuyck made 22 saves in the victory, as Winnipeg extended its winning streak to three games and is on a 7-1-0 run. After blowing a 3-1 lead and trailing 4-3 going into the third period, the Jets dominated the rest of the game, holding a 17-2 edge in shots in the third period. Scheifele evened the score just before the midway point of the period by burying a quick feed from Blake Wheeler.

Wheeler, Bryan Little, Dustin Byfuglien and Morrissey all had two-point games for Winnipeg. Scheifele has eight points in a three-game point spree.

Edmonton's Ryan Spooer started off the roller coaster of a game with a one-timer from the slot at 10:12 of the first period, only to see the Jets take a 3-1 lead.

Mathieu Perreault evened the count at 15:43 of the opening frame with a nifty backhand as he drove the net, and Nikolaj Ehlers scored 68 seconds later. Patrik Laine's 22nd goal of the season at 1:42 of the second period - a hard wrister that beat Cam Talbot's glove hand - had the home crowd rocking. But that's when the Oilers responded with three consecutive goals.

Darnell Nurse made it a one-goal game by tucking home a rebound at 6:04 to kick off a one-sided second period, before Juhar Khaira notched his second of the season by redirecting a crossing pass at the 17:18 mark. Alex Chiasson's power-play goal with 1:05 remaining in the period was his 13th goal of the season, which ties a career high.

Talbot stopped 35 shots for the Oilers, who saw their four-game winning streak snapped. Leon Draisaitl and Connor McDavid each collected two assists. McDavid, who has 10 points in five games, surpassed the 300-point mark in his career.

Meanwhile Jeff Petry continued his hot streak with a two-goal effort to help the Montreal Canadiens post a 6-4 win over the visiting Carolina Hurricanes on Thursday.

Petry gave Montreal its first lead of the game 16:59 into the second period, then added an empty-net score in the final two minutes to clinch the victory. The defenseman now has seven goals on the season, with five of those tallies (plus two assists) coming in his past six games.

The teams combined for seven goals during a wild third period, with Andrew Shaw's marker 12:24 into the period ending up as the game's winning score. On a partial two-on-one play, Shaw took a pass from Shea Weber for his ninth goal of the season. Matthew Pecca, Brendan Gallagher and Artturi Lehkonen scored Montreal's other goals. Phillip Danault and Kenny Agostino each had two assists for the Canadiens.



Winnipeg Jets' Josh Morrissey's (right) celebrates with Mark Scheifele after scoring an overtime goal against the Edmonton Oilers at Bell MTS Place. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

Indians and Mariners swap sluggers Santana and Encarnacion

The Cleveland Indians have traded first baseman and designated hitter Edwin Encarnacion to the Seattle Mariners for slugger Carlos Santana.

Cleveland also gave up a round B draft pick in the deal which was announced on Thursday. The 35-year-old Encarnacion blasted 32 homers and 107 RBIs and batted .246 with the Indians last season.

His RBI total was good enough for third in the American League and he leads all active players with seven straight seasons hitting at least 30 home runs.

"We're excited to add a proven offensive performer in Edwin Encarnacion," said Mariners general manager Jerry Dipoto.

"In addition, by adding another draft pick for 2019, we have another opportunity to add to the talent in our minor league system."

The 14-year veteran has 380 home runs in his career. This marks a return to Cleveland for Santana, who was just traded to the Mariners earlier this month. Santana started his career with Cleveland in 2010.

Santana, 32, posted a .229 average with 24 home runs and 86 RBI last season with the Philadelphia Phillies. Cleveland made another trade with the Tampa Bay Rays at the same time, acquiring first baseman Jake Bauers in exchange for infielder Yandy Diaz and minor-leaguer Cole Sulser.

FOCUS

Complacency biggest challenge for Warriors: coach

Reuters
New York

The Golden State Warriors need to stay hungry for success or see their hopes of a third successive title evaporate, head coach Steve Kerr told reporters on Thursday.

Kerr's team put in an uninspired performance on Wednesday, falling 113-93 to the visiting Toronto Raptors in a loss the coach attributed to a gnawing but natural complacency among his players.

"When you win a championship, part of you forgets how hard it is after the glow of the celebration, the parade and everything else," he said. "You forget how much work you need to put in. And then you do it again. The same thing happens."

Kerr said he felt post-cham-

pionship motivation dips during his playing years, where he won five NBA titles, and said on-court precision has to replace raw desire during the 82-game regular season.

"You have to be able to rely more on execution and discipline rather than emotion," he said. "Looking at last night's game, we didn't have much emotion but we also had very little discipline or execution," he said.

"That's a receipt for disaster against a great team."

The 20-point loss to the Eastern Conference-leading Raptors was remarkable in part because the Warriors were at full strength after starters Stephen Curry and Draymond Green returned to the lineup after being sidelined with injuries.

The loss also laid bare the Warriors biggest weakness - a lack of depth, especially on defence following the retirement

of veteran forward David West prior to the start of the season.

But help is on the way.

Four-time All Star DeMarcus Cousins, who was picked up during the offseason from the New Orleans Pelicans, could reportedly play for the Warriors for the first time in February after tearing his left Achilles in January this year. The towering center, who is nicknamed "Boogie," has been working on his conditioning, Kerr said, although he declined to give an exact timeline for his debut.

"DeMarcus is coming along well, he's practiced a couple times down at Santa Cruz this week," he said.

"He needs to feel confident with the Achilles and his rhythm and his timing so we're not going to rush him back. We're going to help him through that process," he said. "When it happens, it happens."



Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr

RUGBY

Hansen to quit as All Blacks coach after World Cup

'I think it's right for the team to have someone new, some fresh eyes, some fresh thinking'

AFP
Auckland

All Blacks coach Steve Hansen announced yesterday that he will retire after next year's World Cup, saying the world champions need a change once he completes his "toughest" campaign yet with the New Zealanders in Japan.

"I think it's right for the team to have someone new after the World Cup, some fresh eyes, some fresh thinking," he told reporters, hinting that his assistant Ian Foster was his preferred successor.

Hansen, a former policeman, took over in late 2011 after working as Graham Henry's assistant for seven years and guided the All Blacks to World Cup victory in 2015. The team have had a mortgage on rugby's number one ranking under his stewardship, never relinquishing the top spot, and they will seek a third straight world title in Japan next year.

With Hansen in charge, the All Blacks have posted 85 Test victories, eight losses and three draws, a win rate of almost 90 percent. "His record is unsurpassed... whatever happens next in Steve's career, his place as a New Zealand rugby legend is guaranteed," New Zealand Rugby chairman Brent Impey said.

While Fred Allen's All Blacks were unbeaten in the 1960s, he was only in charge for 14 Tests.

Hansen's success rate is unmatched by any All Blacks coach in the professional era, with Henry on 85 percent, John Mitchell 82, John Hart 76 and Wayne Smith 70.

"Steve Hansen's the best All Blacks coach we've had. He's done a fantastic job," Hart told news website stuff.co.nz.

His departure will start a scramble for his position, with Foster and Ireland's Kiwi-born coach Joe Schmidt considered the frontrunners to replace him.

"I've got opinions but for once in my life I'll keep those opinions to myself because I don't think it's helpful for the process," Hansen said when asked about a successor.

However, he did let slip that Foster "would be a great head coach - he's developed as a coach and as a man and has some great qualities and his understanding of the game is great".



New Zealand All Blacks coach Steve Hansen speaks during a press conference in Auckland yesterday. (AFP)

During his tenure, Hansen has displayed a keen eye for talent and instilled a team ethos of constant improvement.

It paid off after 2015, when a string of legendary players including Richie McCaw, Dan Carter, Ma'a Nonu and Conrad Smith retired but the All Blacks' success continued with barely a blip.

Hansen had originally intended to step down in 2017, mid-way through the World Cup cycle, but New Zealand Rugby persuaded him to extend his contract until 2019.

He was adamant that this time, the decision to retire was final, and said he was going to spend more time with his family.

"What's next? I don't know. So don't bother asking," he said, adding that his priority was to guide the All Blacks to victory in Japan, which would be their fourth World Cup victory overall. Hansen said it would be the fifth World Cup he has attended, and he was still excited at the

challenge posed by what will be his final campaign in charge of the team. "It's probably going to be the toughest World Cup from a competitive point of view," he said.

"The northern hemisphere have really come to the party since the last one and got themselves in good nick. I think Australia and South Africa are capable of winning it if they get their stuff sorted."

Hansen coached domestically with Canterbury and was an assistant at Super Rugby level before moving to Wales in 2001 to work under Henry.

He took over the top job in Cardiff in 2002 but had mixed results before returning to New Zealand two years later to again work as Henry's offside, this time with the All Blacks.

Henry said his former protege could leave the All Blacks satisfied with his achievements.

"I think he'll feel at peace," he said. "He's been coaching international rugby for nigh on 20 years."

Johnson to be Wallabies director of rugby: report

Michael Cheika will survive the axe as Wallabies coach but his powers will be curtailed when Scotland-based Scott Johnson is appointed director of rugby above him, a report said yesterday. Cheika has faced a mounting backlash from dismayed fans and former players after winning just four of Australia's 13 Tests this year. Despite the dire results and a slide to sixth in the world rankings, Rugby Australia chief Raelene Castle has consistently backed him to take the team to the World Cup in Japan next year.

A board meeting of the governing body this week to assess the season, with Cheika in attendance, ended without a decision on his future. Chairman Cameron Clyne said his fate would be decided "ahead of Christmas".

The Sydney Daily Telegraph reported that as a compromise

to Cheika staying, Scotland's director of rugby and former Wallabies assistant Johnson will assume a role above him. It said Rugby Australia secretly met with the Sydney-born Johnson during the Wallabies recent tour of Europe and has been working on a deal to bring him home. Johnson became the Scottish director of rugby in 2013 and last worked with Australia at the 2007 World Cup as attack coach under John Connolly. Rugby Australia told AFP it was unable to comment other than "we haven't finalised the review process".

Cheika's fate has split the rugby world with Wallabies legend Matt Burke this week calling for him and his coaching staff to be sacked, describing his situation as "untenable".

But at the same time current Wallaby David Pocock threw his full support behind him.

GOLF

Saksansin leads in Indonesian Masters

AFP
Jakarta

Thai golfer Poom Saksansin took the lead on the second round at the Indonesian Masters yesterday and broke his personal best record in a play suspended due to a fading light.

The 25-year-old Poom led the second round clubhouse with nine-under-par 63 to take lead in the second round of the BNI Indonesian Masters. "I was just lucky today, I think I like this course. I won here before two years ago. My putting was very good today," he said.

Poom, who won the 2016 the Indonesian Masters in 2016 compiled a two-day total of 14-under-par 130, lead his fellow Thai golfers Suradit Yongcharoenchai and Jakraphan Premisirigorn who scored a 66 and 65 respectively.

Jakraphan who missed the cut in six straight events before finishing tied-second in Pakistan in October said sharing second place gave him a much needed confidence in the tournament.

"I'm playing on this golf course for the first time and to



Poom Saksansin

be able to post a 65 today is a really good achievement," he said. Former US Open champion Justin Rose from England, whose first round on Thursday was disrupted by a severe thunderstorm, remains six shots back of Poom after he signed for a 68.

Rose was previously only one shot behind his compatriot John Catlin and South Korea's Sungho Lee, who shared the lead at the Asian Tour's season-ending event with opening rounds of 66 on Thursday. "It was a bit more windy today. Today was tough to make birdies, I wasn't quite on my game," Rose said after the game.

Yesterday's play was suspended due to fading light at 5:50pm local time, leaving 20 players having to return on Saturday morning to complete their rounds.

FOCUS

Koreas to meet IOC in February on joint Olympic bid

AFP
Seoul

The two Koreas yesterday agreed to hold talks with the International Olympic Committee on their joint bid for the 2032 Summer Games in February, Seoul said, as a rapid diplomatic thaw takes hold on the peninsula.

North and South Korean officials will meet with the IOC in Lausanne, Switzerland on February 15 to discuss the prospects of co-hosting the 2032 Olympics, according to a joint statement following a cross-border meeting on Friday.

Making a joint bid for the 2032 Games was part of a broader agreement made between the North's leader Kim Jong-un and the South's President Moon Jae-in during their third summit in Pyongyang in September.

If it materialises, it will mark the first time for the Olympics, summer or winter, to be shared by two countries. The two sides also agreed to form unified teams at the Tokyo Summer Paralympics in 2020, in addition to their earlier deal to jointly compete at

the Olympics in the same year.

They have yet to determine which Olympic sport will have North and South Koreans on the same team, but the South's chief delegate said a decision will be reached in the next few weeks. "We agreed to narrow down the sports to those that will see a synergy effect under co-operation between the South and North," vice sports minister Roh Taek-hang said after the meeting, according to pool reports. The two Koreas technically remain at war after the 1950-53 Korean War ended with an armistice instead of a peace treaty with military clashes often erupting along the frontier.

But ties improved markedly after Pyongyang sent athletes and top delegates - including leader Kim's younger sister - to the 2018 Winter Games held in the South in February, for which the two rivals also formed a joint women's ice hockey team. Kim has made a series of reconciliatory gestures since then, including a landmark summit with US President Donald Trump in Singapore in June and two summits with Moon - a dove who advocates dialogue with the North.

NFL

Chargers stun Chiefs to clinch playoff berth

AFP
Los Angeles

The Los Angeles Chargers rallied with two late touchdowns and a courageous two-point conversion with four seconds left Thursday in a thrilling 29-28 NFL triumph over the Chiefs in Kansas City.

Trailing 28-14 early in the fourth quarter, Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers engineered two touchdown drives in the last four minutes of regulation.

Justin Jackson's three-yard scoring run with 3:49 to play trimmed the deficit.

After the Chiefs were unable to answer, Rivers responded with another scoring drive capped by a one-yard TD pass to Williams.

Rather than go for an extra point to force overtime, the Chargers went for the riskier two-point conversion, and Rivers found Williams in the end zone to seal the stunning comeback.

The Chargers clinched a playoff berth, and pulled level with the Chiefs atop the AFC West division at 11-3.

The Chiefs own the tiebreaker



Los Angeles Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers throws a pass during their NFL game against Kansas City Chiefs. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

thanks to a better record against division rivals, so the Chargers need to finish with a better record to seize the division crown. "It's good to be in the playoffs, but we're not done," Chargers coach Anthony Lynn said.

"We want to win this division. So we've got work to do, and we're going to need a little help to get that done, but that's our goal."

Lynn said it was a "no brainer" to go for the two-point conver-

sion, rather than an extra point to tie.

"We didn't come here to tie," he said. "We came here to win."

The victory ended the Chargers' nine-game losing streak to the Chiefs - a skid that dated back to 2013. That was also the last year the Chargers reached the playoffs.

The Chiefs had seized a 28-14 lead with a 75-yard, 13-play scoring drive that ate up nearly eight minutes on the clock.

Kansas City converted three third downs on the drive, which was aided by three penalties on the Chargers. Los Angeles responded with a 75-yard drive that ended with Jackson's touchdown run and Michael Bradley's extra point that pulled the Chargers within 28-21.

After the defense forced the Patrick Mahomes-led Chiefs offense to punt, Rivers and Williams took over.

Rivers admitted that at moments he thought two first-half turnovers - including an interception on his first passing attempt of the game - would prove too much to overcome.

The Chiefs took advantage of the first interception with a 49-yard drive that ended with Mahomes connecting with Demarcus Robinson from five yards out for the first touchdown of the game.

Mahomes hit Darrel Williams with an 11-yarder to make it 14-0. The Chargers narrowed the gap with Rivers' three-yard TD pass to Williams - a preview of the last-gasp heroics. "We just kept playing," Rivers said.

"This place is unbelievable to play in," he added of the raucous Arrowhead Stadium.

"Hard, tough. This team just kept fighting."

SWIMMING

Titmus sets new world record

AFP
Shanghai

Australian prodigy Ariarne Titmus broke the women's short-course 400m freestyle record yesterday to grab her second gold medal at the World Swimming Championships in China.

In a battle of the talented teenagers, the 18-year-old - dubbed the "Terminator" - blasted away the twin threat of home hopes Wang Jianjiahe and Li Bingjie in Hangzhou's 25m pool. Titmus claimed a dominant victory in 3mins 53.92secs, narrowly bettering the 3:53.97 clocked in October by rival Wang, who is just 16.

Wang, an easy winner in the 800m freestyle, was forced into silver, 0.64secs behind Titmus, with Li a distant 4.07secs off. Titmus also claimed gold on Tuesday, the first day of competition, in the 200m freestyle in an Australian and Oceania record time of 1:51.38. "I am a little bit in shock," she said after her latest triumph. "I knew the Chinese girl (Wang) would go out fast and I was worried she would have a little left in the tank at the end, but I held her off. "I



Ariarne Titmus poses with 400m freestyle gold at the 14th FINA World Swimming Championships (25m) Finals in Hangzhou yesterday. (Reuters)

can't believe it and for it to be a short-course world record is something. I am someone who does not pride themselves on speed, but I will take it."

It has been a breakthrough year for the young Australian, who won three golds at the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games earlier in 2018. She only turned 18 in September and has already earned the

nickname "Terminator" - her Dad calls her "Arnie" and that became Terminator in Australian media after the Arnold Schwarzenegger character.

There was a surprise in the men's 50m freestyle when Caeleb Dressel of the United States, who has been likened to US legend Michael Phelps, was beaten into silver by Russia's Vladimir Morozov.

TENNIS

Wimbledon set to expand after golf club agrees to sell

'The decision of the Wimbledon Park Golf Club members to vote in favour of the acquisition offer is a hugely significant moment for the AELTC and The Championships'



A July 5, 2018 picture shows doubles matches in progress on the outside courts at the All England Lawn Tennis Club, London. (Reuters)

Reuters
London

Wimbledon's plans to expand the size of its grounds took a step forward on Thursday when members of a local golf club voted to sell their land to the Grand Slam tournament's organisers.

The All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC) had made a 63.75 million pounds (\$80.68 million) offer, according to British media reports, to buy out early the lease of the adjacent Wimbledon Park Golf Club.

The AELTC said in a statement on Thursday that members of the 120-year-old golf club had voted in favour of the offer and the deal, which would see Wimbledon almost triple the size of its grounds, would go through on December 21 pending court approval.

"The decision of the Wimbledon Park Golf Club members to vote in favour of the acquisition offer is a hugely significant moment for the AELTC and The Championships," AELTC chairman Philip Brook said.

WTA to offer increased rankings protection for returning mothers

The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) will offer greater protection to the rankings of mothers returning to the tour after giving birth, British media reported on Thursday. Players returning from maternity leave or injury will now be able to use their previous ranking to enter 12 tournaments over a three-year period. However, Serena Williams' request for returning mothers to be seeded in line with their rankings has not been approved. The 23-times Grand Slam champion made a comeback in February after giving birth to her daughter

last year. Her world ranking had fallen to 451 when she was not seeded at the French Open. She was, however, seeded 25th at this year's Wimbledon despite being ranked outside world's top 32 players. The BBC reported that the WTA had also clarified its regulations around clothing to ensure Williams would be able to wear the black catsuit which attracted the ire of the French Tennis Federation president Bernard Giudicelli. The WTA did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for confirmation.

In 2013 the AELTC rolled out a Wimbledon Master Plan aimed at making sure the grasscourt Grand Slam kept pace with its rivals - the Australian Open, French Open and US Open - in terms of facilities and crowd experience.

Part of that was to construct a roof over Court One which will be completed

in time for the 2019 Championships.

The acquisition of the golf course, which will continue to operate 18 holes until the end of 2021, will eventually allow the Wimbledon qualifying tournament to be staged on site.

Currently it is held a few miles away in Roehampton. Wimbledon's planned ex-

pansion across the road on to the course has received criticism, but the AELTC ruled out any development that did not "protect and celebrate the heritage of the park."

"For the avoidance of doubt, there never has been and never will be any plans to build multi-storey car parks and shopping villages or any other structures that would be completely out of character for the AELTC and The Championships," the AELTC said.

Media reports say the golf club's 754 members will receive 85,000 pounds each in compensation. One member, Martin Sumpton, was one of the minority of members to speak out against the sale. "120 years of playing golf at Wimbledon Park has ended because of greed," he told the *Guardian*.

"People wanted to take the money, and that's hardly surprising. It is a lot of money."

Jenny Gaskin, chair of Wimbledon Park Golf Club, said: "This has been a long but thorough process and I and the rest of the board would like to thank all members who participated in and voted either in person or by proxy."

SPOTLIGHT

Tokyo, Singapore battle London to host ATP Finals

AFF
London

Tokyo and Singapore are battling London to host the ATP Finals from 2021 to 2025, the governing body of men's tennis announced yesterday.

The shortlist for the end-of-season showpiece also includes the northern English city of Manchester and Italy's Turin, while the London deal, which runs until 2020, could be extended. The announcement of the candidates follows an extensive bid application process that began in August, in which more than 40 cities worldwide expressed an interest in hosting the event.

The final phase will see the ATP visit the cities, with a decision on the successful candidate to be made not before March 2019.

"The level of interest we have received worldwide throughout the bid application process reflects the rich heritage of this unique tournament, as well as the success of the event at the O2 since 2009," said Chris Kermode, ATP executive chairman and president.

The ATP Finals were first held

in Tokyo in 1970 and have been staged in some of the major cities around the world, including New York, Sydney, and Shanghai.

Its longest stay in a single venue was across 13 consecutive editions at Madison Square Garden from 1977 to 1989 but it has been held at London's O2 arena since 2009 - drawing more than 250,000 fans annually.

The tournament has been won by many of the all-time greats, including Bjorn Borg, John McEnroe, Pete Sampras, Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic.

The season-ending event features only the world's best eight qualified singles players and doubles teams following a year-long race to qualify.

Federer and Djokovic were split at last month's tournament, won for the first time by Germany's Alexander Zverev, over whether it should remain in London.

Federer, who has won the event a record six times, twice in London, said the British capital was the perfect fit.

But world number one Djokovic, who has won the event five times - four times in London - said he was in favour of moving the tournament around to promote the sport.

HOCKEY

India coach apologises to fans after WCup exit

Reuters
Bhubaneswar,

India's hockey coach Harendra Singh has apologised after a 2-1 quarter-final defeat by the Netherlands ended their hopes of winning the World Cup on home soil.

"First of all, I like to tender my apology to the people in India for not giving the results what they deserve. But, I am not going to take it very easily," Harendra told reporters at Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar on Thursday.

The visitors benefited from a disputed penalty corner that resulted in the decisive goal being scored in the 50th minute.

India defender Amit Rohidas was given a 10-minute suspension in the fourth quarter and the Indian coach was critical of the officials.

"It was not 11 players against 11. It was 11 against 13," Harendra said.

"If they (umpires) don't want to improve, we will continue to face these type of results."

India, who won six Olympic hockey golds in a row between 1928 and 1956, secured their lone World Cup triumph in 1975 in Kuala Lumpur.

Following their last Olympic gold in 1980, India's performances declined over the next three decades as the game moved from natural grass to synthetic surfaces.

The current squad produced glimpses of their glorious past during their run to the Champions Trophy final this year but

their World Cup exit proves there is still plenty of work to be done.

Indian captain Manpreet Singh said there was little point in contesting umpiring decisions after the match.

"What's the use of appealing now? We have lost the World Cup anyway," he said.

"We have to accept the defeat gracefully. The federation, players and coaches invest so much of time for a tournament. But you could ruin the 4-6 years' hard work with one wrong decision."

In the semi-finals England will take on Belgium, while Australia will meet the Netherlands today.

"It feels amazing to be in the semi-finals of the World Cup. We've enjoyed improving and seeing positive results as we have progressed through the tournament. Belgium are a very talented team, with some great players, but we are confident and have a lot of momentum behind us, and we want to keep that going, and see where it leads us," England's co-captain Phil Roper said.

Talking about his team's chances, The Netherlands' coach Max Caldas said: "We are very happy that we've reached the semi-finals."

"We worked hard to get to this point. Tomorrow brings a new challenge. After playing the home-team in a fantastic atmosphere, we're now preparing to play the reigning champions and number one in the world rankings. We are looking forward to that."

BADMINTON

Momota powers into World Tour Finals semis

AFF
Shanghai

World champion Kento Momota revved into the last four of badminton's \$1.5 million World Tour Finals with a third comprehensive victory yesterday.

The all-action Japanese star powered past Indonesia's Tommy Sugiarto 21-14, 21-8 in just 36 minutes in the Chinese city of Guangzhou. Joining the world number one from Group B is the late Indian qualifier Sameer Verma, who will play home hope Shi Yuqi in today's last four.

Momota, the man to beat, will be strong favourite against South Korea's Son Wan-ho in their semi-final. The 24-year-old Momota has won all three of his matches this week

without dropping a game. Victory in Guangzhou would be a fitting end to a spectacular year in which he has reached number one in the world for the first time and won his maiden world title.

It is all a far cry from 2016, when he was banned for more than a year by the Japanese team for visiting an illegal casino, missing the Rio Olympics.

In the women's draw, there was heartbreak for world number one Tai Tzu-ying. The Taiwanese retired with a right hamstring strain against Japan's Akane Yamaguchi and said: "I've never had this injury before. 'I felt it during today's match. I feel bad that the tournament ended like this for me, but there was nothing I could do'."

Yamaguchi will face Nozomi Okuhara in an all-Japanese showdown while in-form P.V.

Sindhu of India plays Thailand's Ratchanok Intanon in the other women's semi-final.

INDIAN BADMINTON ACE NEHWAL WEDS KASHYAP

India's former world number one Saina Nehwal yesterday announced her marriage to fellow badminton player Parupalli Kashyap, calling it the best match of her life.

Nehwal, 28, also shared a couple of pictures in which the duo are seen dressed in traditional Indian attire and wearing flower garlands. The post, which included a heart and a smiling face emoji, was hashtagged #just-married. Nehwal and Kashyap are planning a grand reception on December 21, local media reports said. The couple confirmed their relationship in October although rumours about their relationship had been swirling

for some time. Nehwal said she had started dating Kashyap, 32, in 2007 after they began going on tours together but delayed the marriage in order to focus on their careers. Nehwal, who won a bronze at the Asian Games in Jakarta, is currently 10th in the world badminton rankings.

Their wedding is the latest after a string of high-profile Indian sportspeople tied the knot.

Grand Slam-winning Indian tennis star Sania Mirza married Pakistan cricketer Shaohab Malik in a dazzling ceremony in 2010 while wicketkeeper Dinesh Karthik is married to squash sensation Dipika Pallikal.

Fast bowler Ishant Sharma married national basketball player Pratima Singh in 2016, and last year Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli tied the knot with one of the top Bollywood stars Anushka Sharma.



Kento Momota of Japan reacts after his men's singles third round match against Tommy Sugiarto of Indonesia at the 2018 BWF World Tour Finals in Guangzhou yesterday. (AFP)

FOCUS

Flag Relay unites nation in show of pride and solidarity



The Flag Relay reaches the Qatar Olympic Committee headquarters before moving to Katara on Thursday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The second edition of Flag Relay wrapped up in style on Thursday following an extraordinary show of unity, pride and inspiration in celebration of the maroon flag and Qatar's National Day.

More than 1,000 people from all walks of life took part in Flag Relay 2018, including current and former Team Qatar athletes, ambassadors, diplomatic core, nearly 800 schoolchildren, 10 cancer survivors, as well as hundreds of participants from the public.

International football superstars Wesley Sneijder and Samuel Eto'o, who ply their trade in Qatar were also part of the relay, bringing a wealth of inspiration to the young participants and demonstrating the global status of Qatar as a sports pioneer.

"Once again, we proved what this country is made of pride, unity and strong resolve. People from all walks of life united for Qatar in a show of inclusiveness and multiculturalism that makes our country stand out. We couldn't be prouder of our community and how everyone came together for Qatar," Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) secretary-general Jassim Rashid al-Buenain said.

Hundreds of participants exchanged the Qatari flag as it travelled through iconic landmarks around the country,



Schoolchildren walk with the flag on the Corniche.

starting from Team Qatar's Winter Camp in Sealine and transporting it towards a grand finale at Aspire Park.

The stops included Hamad International Airport, Museum of Islamic Art, Katara, The Pearl, Qatar University, Qatar Foundation, Sheraton Park, Lusail Marina, Al Thakheera Mangroves and Qatar Olympic Committee.

Flag Relay 2018 stops were chosen wisely to include landmarks that reflect different aspects of life in Qatar such as culture, sport, entertainment, nature and

environment.

Among the participants were several Team Qatar athletes who shared their pride to carry the flag with the whole nation. Team Qatar sprinter Mariam Farid was additionally excited to share her sport with the community while being one of the flagbearers.

"This moment has an extra element of significance for me because not only did I proudly raise the flag of my beloved country together with Team Qatar athletes but also I got to do it whilst doing my favourite thing

ever, which is running," Farid said.

"This is a great opportunity to introduce the community, especially women, to sport in general and running in particular and I'm really happy to see people from all ages and cultures practice my sport," the 20-year-old Team Qatar athlete added.

The flag's journey around Qatar saw it travel through several different sports such as running, walking, swimming, cycling in addition to driving and flying.

The day ended with celebrations at Aspire Park where a gathering of Team Qatar athletes, stakeholder of Qatar Olympic Committee and the public came together to watch the finale.

QOC president HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani handed the flag to Team Qatar athletes who passed it on to each other before a trio of athletes collectively hoisted it.

Two-time Olympic medallist Mutaz Barshim; Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdullah al-Thani, the first Qatari to summit Everest; and Team Qatar's squash player Abdulla al-Tamimi were the three athletes making the final act as Flag Relay 2018 came to an end after uniting a nation and inspiring solidarity and hope.

In its second edition, Flag Relay was an occasion for the different segments of society, including citizens and residents, to unite behind Qatar's flag, express solidarity and pride and show what the country means for its people.

HORSE RACING

Tip Two Win bidding for Al Rayyan treble at Qatar Derby

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Racing & Equestrian Club (QREC) will organise the Qatar International Derby Festival at Al Rayyan Park on December 21-22, 2018, with Tip Two Win, who proved his mettle with a second place in the QIPCO 2000 Guineas at Newmarket last May, the star attraction.

Trained in Berkshire by Roger Teal, Tip Two Win is defending an unbeaten record at Al Rayyan having won on both of his visits to Doha last winter. He went on to frank that form in the Guineas, with superstars like Epsom Derby winner, Masar; the European Horse Of The Year, Roaring Lion; and the Breeders' Cup Mile hero, Expert Eye, behind him.

Tip Two Win has not raced since finishing unplaced in the Group 2 Qatar Lennox Stakes at Goodwood on July 31. He had earlier come home in fourth in the Group 1 St James's Palace Stakes at Royal Ascot.

team up to take part December 22nd's two big races for purebred Arabians.

Rijm, winner of a Group 1 in Toulouse in October, is their representative in the US\$150,000 Qatar Pure Arabian Derby for four-year-olds over a mile and a quarter on turf.

His ten Qatari-trained opponents in a classy renewal include Easter de Faust, winner of five of her six career starts including the Emir's Silver Sword and last year's Qatar Derby for three-year-olds; the dual French Group 2 winner, Rajeh; and the first three home from last month's Arabian Guineas at Al Rayyan - Abercrombie, Evolution du Croate and Meelad.

Fourcy and Augé rely on Amir Al Cham, placed at Group 2 level on his penultimate start, in the Qatar Pure Arabian Derby for three-year-olds, a one-mile turf event worth US\$100,000 (£74,074). The ten-strong home team here is led by Daloub and Tabouk, who fought out a tight finish at this course three weeks ago.



He is one of five European-trained thoroughbreds declared to run at the Festival, where he will contest the US\$500,000 Qatar Derby over a mile and a quarter on turf on December 22.

He will as usual be ridden by David Probert when it is part of a 12-runner line-up alongside the three-time Listed Race scorer, Mr Satchmo (trained in France by Antoine de Watrigant and ridden by Olivier Peslier), and Tadhg O'Shea's mount Ming, who was beaten less than four lengths in the Grade 1 Secretariat Stakes in America in August and is trained in Ireland by Joseph O'Brien.

Home hopes largely rest with the 1-2-3 from last month's Thoroughbred Guineas: Prepare For Battle, Al Adaid and Alhazm.

On December 21, there will be two British runners among a 12-strong field for the US\$100,000 Al Rayyan Stakes - Concierge (trained by George Scott and ridden by Jason Watson) and Don Armado (trained by Stuart Williams and ridden by Probert).

This is a seven-furlong turf contest which Tip Two Win won last December before returning to Doha to land the Al Biddah Mile eight weeks later.

French handler Thomas Fourcy and jockey Julien Augé will

Roger Teal, trainer of Tip Two Win, said: "Tip Two Win had a racecourse gallop at Kempton Park on Tuesday morning and put a big smile on my face. He went so well that I'm starting to get nervous already ahead of the Qatar Derby.

"David (Probert) rode him and he went one circuit, which is a mile and a quarter, in the company of High Acclaim, who is a very good work horse. They went a nice strong pace all the way.

"Al Rayyan is a nice level track and he will be able to bounce off the fast surface there so if he's going to get a mile and a quarter anywhere, it will be in Doha. It's great prize money and they looked after us so well last year that we have to give it another go.

"His plane leaves in the early hours of Saturday morning and he's a good traveller - nothing fazes him."

QREC chief executive officer Nasser Sherida al-Kaabi said, "The Qatar Racing & Equestrian Club is very pleased with the quality of the entries for this year's Qatar International Derby Festival. We look forward to hosting so many international friends and horses at the Festival as we once more take the opportunity to promote Qatar as a world hub for horseracing and a leader in the pure Arabian breed."

Saeed al-Qadi tops Medium Tour, Tamader al-Marri claims Small Tour



Saeed Nasser al-Qadi (centre) won the Medium Tour, Table A, One round with jump-off, Art.238.2.2, 120/130cm event on Daydreamer EC ahead of second-placed Khalid Mohamed al-Emadi (second from left), riding Fiji, and third-placed Jaber Rashid al-Amri (second from right), riding Canavaro De Muze (E.T.), during the Hathab equestrian series event at the Qatar Equestrian Federation arena yesterday. PICTURES: Garsi Lotfi



Saeed Nasser al-Qadi rides Daydreamer EC to victory in the Medium Tour, Table A, One round with jump-off, Art.238.2.2, 120/130cm event.



Tamader Said al-Marri (second from left) won the Small Tour Accumulator with Joker, Art. 269.5 | 100/115cm event on Lucky Lady ahead of second-placed Khalid Hamad al-Attiyah (left), riding Viking D, and third-placed Khalifa Abdulla al-Khalidi (right), riding Dusty, yesterday.