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Holders Australia make winning start at World Cup



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Reds face Everton test as Spurs take on Arsenal

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Rabi' al Thani, 1440 AH

GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

Shadman, Shakib give hosts solid start against Windies

Page 2

AVC ASPIRE QATAR MASTER BEACH VOLLEYBALL

Younousse, Tijan delight home crowd to notch title hat-trick

After winning the Asia Championship and the Asian Games gold, Qatar duo bag their second straight Qatar Master title



Qatar's Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan pose on the podium with the winners' trophies and the cheque after winning the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) Aspire Qatar Master at Aspire Park yesterday. PICTURES: Jayaram



Qatar's Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan celebrate their victory over Australia's Damien Schumann and Cole Durant in the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) Aspire Qatar Master final yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Top-seeded Qatari pair of Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan completed a hat-trick of titles this year by retaining their Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) Aspire Qatar Master title yesterday.

In front of the home crowd, Younousse and Tijan defeated Australians Damien Schumann and Cole Durant 2-0 (21-16, 21-18) in the final at the Aspire Park.

Qatar Master is the third title for the fast-rising world No. 10 Qatari duo in 2018. They became Asia champions in Satun, Thailand, in September, after winning gold at the 18th Asian Games in

Jakarta in August.

"We're very happy with the victory. It was the last piece of the cake after winning the Asian Games and Asia Championship this year. We wanted to finish the year with this title in front of the home crowd," said Younousse.

"I loved the crowd. This was the first time that such a big crowd had come to support us and beach volleyball," he said.

On the other hand it was a disappointing end for the Aussies again. Last year, Younousse and Jefferson Santos Pereira had rallied to beat top Australian pair of Chris McHugh and Damien Schumann in three sets.

Yesterday, in the first set, both Durant and Schumann combined well to keep their team ahead. But



Qatar's Cherif Younousse (left) is greeted by the fans after their victory in the final yesterday.

after the mid-stage, Qatar regained the charge and went through. Schumann was, however, pleased

with the progress the Australian teams made ahead of the Olympic qualifications next season.

"We're a new team, so we were happy to make the final. We played well most of the game. We dropped a couple of points and then we gave away some points while catching up with the other team," Schumann said.

Tijan was also happy with their win as he said: "This was how we'd had been planning to finish the tournament. It wasn't an easy final, especially in the first set. The Australians are very tough but we're happy that we finished as unbeaten in the continent through three events."

Japan's Yuya Gottsu and Ageba Ishijima, who lost to the eventual champions in the semi-finals 2-0 (21-16, 21-10) earlier in the day, finished third with a victory over the former Asian Games and

Asia champions Kazakhstan's Alexandr Dyachenko and Alexey Sidoranko 2-1 (17-21, 21-19, 15-12) in the hard-liner match.

"We're very delighted to finish third. We're playing together for the first time and it was a good result for us. I'm trying to get a chance to appear at another Olympic Games and it would be very nice if I can make it in the home Games. But the competition is very stiff with Qatar and Australia having tough teams. We'll try our best and see if we can do it," said Ishijima.

Prizes were given away by Aspire Zone Foundation chief marketing officer Mohamed Mubarak al-Kuwari, and Sports Corner general manager Barbaros Akyildiz, in the presence of Qatar

Volleyball Association president Ali Ghanim al-Kuwari.

RESULTS

Final: Cherif Younousse/ Ahmed Tijan (Qatar) beat Cole Durant/ Damien Schumann (Australia) 21-16, 21-18 (30 Minutes)

Third place match: Yusuke Ishijima/ Yuya Ageba (Japan) beat Alexey Sidoranko/ Alexandr Dyachenko (Kazakhstan) 17-21, 21-19, 15-12 (46 Minutes)

Semi-finals: Cherif Younousse/ Ahmed Tijan (Qatar) beat Yusuke Ishijima/ Yuya Ageba (Japan) 21-16, 21-10 (34 minutes); Cole Durant/ Damien Schumann (Australia) beat Alexey Sidoranko/ Alexandr Dyachenko (Kazakhstan) 21-15, 21-17 (41 minutes)

THREAT

Boxing still on the ropes after IOC freezes planning for 2020

Reuters
Tokyo

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) put planning for the Tokyo 2020 boxing tournament on hold yesterday in a move that could see the governing body AIBA frozen out of the Games over a governance dispute.

The IOC said in a statement it had also launched an investigation into the International Boxing Association after AIBA submitted a progress report focusing on governance, financial management and sporting integrity.

It referred to that enquiry as "the initiation of a procedure which can lead to the withdrawal of recognition for AIBA" but said it still hoped boxing would be part of the programme. "The IOC Executive Board makes all efforts to protect the athletes and ensure that a boxing tournament can take place at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 regardless of these measures," the statement read.

The IOC's Executive Board said planning for the Olympic boxing tournament had been frozen, with immediate effect, and contact suspended between AIBA and the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee.

"This will also include the freezing of any ticket sales for the boxing competitions or any approval or implementation of the qualification system," the IOC's Sports Director Kit McConnell said in Tokyo yesterday.

No deadline was set for further action but any decision to withdraw recognition from an international federation would have to be made at an IOC session. The next one is scheduled for June 2019.

McConnell said AIBA had been given adequate time to address the IOC's concerns.

"The timeline from the time we raised these questions is not short in that regard," he said.

"These questions have been on the table throughout the whole of 2018 and tomorrow is December," AIBA, who did not respond to



(From left) George Foreman, Floyd Mayweather and Muhammad Ali, all star pro boxers, have won medals at the Summer Olympics during their time. The sport is, however, fighting for its Olympic future amid serious concerns over the governing body AIBA. (AFP)

a Reuters request for comment yesterday, has been in turmoil for years and the IOC has warned the Swiss-based body to sort out its finances and governance, as well

as anti-doping issues, or risk missing out on the Tokyo Games. Tokyo 2020 spokesman Masa Takaya said that Games organisers were very keen to work closely

with the IOC to address any impact on planning.

'SIGNIFICANT CONCERN'
The IOC executive board said

AIBA had made progress but points of "significant concern" remained.

They included doubts about AIBA's ability to continue as a going concern.

"This means basically (being able) to operate under normal financial circumstances with revenues to match the expenditure," said McConnell.

"Equally, there are elements of the audited and financial reports which are still omitted and are not included in the information that has been provided to us and not available on the AIBA website."

AIBA said in a statement released to the media on Thursday that they had restored "a healthy and sustainable financial situation" to their accounts.

"The fear of going bankrupt due to past financial mismanagement is now far behind us," AIBA president Gafur Rahimov said in the statement.

"It is time to turn the page and look further to the development of boxing worldwide."

The IOC yesterday noted un-

certainty about the role of Rahimov, an Uzbek, resulting from his "designation as a key member and associate of a transnational organised criminal network by the US Treasury Department".

Rahimov was one of two Olympic officials barred by the Australian government from attending the 2000 Sydney Games for security reasons.

Despite its concerns, the IOC said it remained determined to feature boxing at Tokyo 2020.

"The goal again is that, by the time of the session in 2019, (the IOC will) be able to confirm, while protecting the integrity of the sport and while protecting the athletes... an Olympic boxing competition here in Tokyo," said McConnell.

Boxing has featured in all but one of the Summer Olympics since 1904 with Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier, George Foreman, Sugar Ray Leonard, Anthony Joshua and Katie Taylor among those to have won gold medals and gone on to claim professional world titles.

FOCUS

India's Shaw out of first Test with ankle injury



India's Prithvi Shaw (centre) is carried off after injuring his ankle on the third day of the tour match against Cricket Australia XI in Sydney yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Sydney

India batsman Prithvi Shaw has been ruled out of next week's first Test against Australia after the young opener injured his ankle while fielding during a tour match in Sydney yesterday, according to the country's cricket board (BCCI).

The 19-year-old was taken to hospital for scans after he rolled his left ankle when taking a catch on the deep mid-wicket boundary and tumbled over the rope during the third day of the warm-up contest against a Cricket Australia XI.

Shaw was chaired off the field by India physiotherapist Patrick Farhart and a support staff member into the away team dressing room at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG).

"Shaw underwent scans this morning and the reports revealed

a lateral ligament injury," BCCI said in a statement. "Shaw will be unavailable for the first Test against Australia in Adelaide.

"He will undergo an intensive rehabilitation program to hasten the recovery and be available for selection at the earliest."

It was a massive blow for India with the promising teenager an almost certain starter in the four-match series after a spectacular debut against West Indies last month.

India's other opening batsman Lokesh Rahul has struggled for runs and the third option, Murali Vijay, is on the comeback trail after he was dropped following a poor tour of England earlier this year.

Shaw scored an attacking 134 on his debut against West Indies and followed up with a 70 and unbeaten 33 in the second Test against the Caribbean side.

He was also impressive on Thursday with a sparkling 66, hitting 11 boundaries in his 69-

ball knock.

India would hope to have him back in the starting lineup for the second Test at Perth, starting on Dec 14.

The touring side's bowlers also had a gloomy day on the field against the representative team, who reached 356 for six at stumps replying to India's 358.

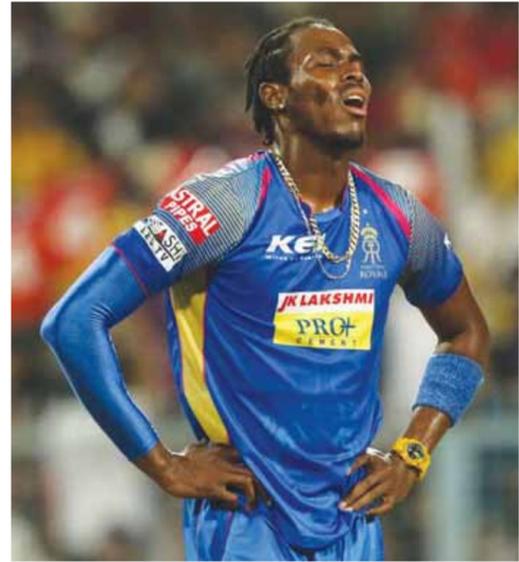
The local side got off to a rollicking start to reach 114 without loss through an opening stand between D'Arcy Short and Max Bryant.

Off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin broke the partnership by dismissing Bryant for 62, while Australia international Short fell to fast bowler Mohammed Shami after a knock of 74.

Shami took 3-67 to put India in a position of strength by reducing their opponents to 234-6 at one stage but they recovered through an unbroken seventh wicket stand of 122 for the seventh between Harry Nielsen (56) and Aaron Hardie (69).

OPPORTUNITY

England rule change could see Archer playing at World Cup



Reuters
London

Barbados-born all-rounder Jofra Archer will be eligible to play for England at next year's Cricket World Cup following a rule change announced on Thursday.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said overseas players would, from January 1, become eligible to play for England after living in the country for three years rather than a previous seven.

Archer would not have been able to play for England until 2022 under the existing rules.

The 23-year-old Sussex player, who has a British father and

passport, featured for West Indies at under-19 level and arrived in Britain in 2015.

The Rajasthan Royals paid 72mn Indian rupees (\$1.03mn) for him after a fierce bidding war in last January's Indian Premier League Twenty20 auction.

Archer could also be available for England's Caribbean tour that runs from January to March, and includes matches in Barbados, although other T20 contractual obligations may make that difficult.

"It may or may not happen but I would love to debut in front of my family," he said on Twitter on Thursday.

The ECB said the change brought the body closer to the International Cricket Council (ICC) rules.

SECOND TEST

Shadman, Shakib give hosts solid start

Shadman hit 76, Shakib unbeaten on 55 as Bangladesh reached 259-5 against WI

AFP
Dhaka

Debutant opener Shadman Islam and skipper Shakib Al Hasan hit a fifty each to put Bangladesh into a comfortable position in the second Test against the West Indies in Dhaka yesterday.

Shadman hit 76 runs while Shakib remained unbeaten on 55 as Bangladesh reached 259-5 at stumps on the opening day after electing to bat first at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Leg-spinner Devendra Bishoo picked up two wickets for 69 runs for the West Indies, but the visitors lacked a cutting edge on the first-day track.

Shadman anchored the innings with his 199-run ball knock before Shakib and Mahmudullah Riyad put Bangladesh in control with an unbroken 69-run sixth-wicket partnership.

Shadman, who played more balls than any other debutant Bangladeshi opener, shared three useful partnerships of 42, 45 and 64 with Soumya Sarkar, Mominul Haque and Mohamed Mithun.

Roston Chase got the West Indies' first breakthrough when he removed opener Soumya, who made 19 before edging to Shai Hope at first slip.



Bangladesh's Shadman Islam (left) plays a shot as West Indies's wicketkeeper Shane Dowrich looks on during the first day of the second Test in Dhaka yesterday. (AFP)

Kemar Roach dismissed Mominul Haque (29) on the stroke of lunch break before Mithun was bowled by Bishoo for the same score.

Shadman brought up his 50 off 147 balls by sweeping left-arm spinner Jomel Warrican through square leg for a bound-

ary, and was in line to become only the fourth Bangladeshi to score a century on debut.

But Bishoo dashed his hopes by trapping him leg-before wicket in the post-lunch session.

Right-arm pacer Sherman Lewis bowled Mushfiqur Rahim for 14 to give the West Indies

further success but Shakib and Mahmudullah, 31 overnight, held firm until the close.

Shakib was uncharacteristically restrained in bringing up his 24th Test 50 off 98 balls, with just one boundary.

Bangladesh went into the game without any recognised

Scorecard	
BANGLADESH 1st innings	
S. Islam lbw b Bishoo	76
S. Sarkar c Hope b Chase	19
M. Haque c Chase b Roach	29
M. Mithun b Bishoo	29
Shakib Al Hasan not out	55
M. Rahim b Lewis	14
Mahmudullah not out	31
Extras (b2, nb 4)	6
Total (five wickets, 90 overs)	259
Fall of wickets: 1-42 (Sarkar), 2-87 (Haque), 3-151 (Mithun), 4-161 (S. Islam), 5-190 (Rahim)	
Bowling: Roach 15-1-38-1 (nb1), Lewis 12-1-35-1, Chase 21-0-61-1, Warrican 19-2-46-0, Bishoo 19-1-69-2 (nb3), Brathwaite 4-0-8-0	

fast bowler as they dropped Mustafizur Rahman and replaced him with additional batsman Liton Das.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur overcame concerns about his fitness to be included in the side.

West Indies replaced the suspended Shannon Gabriel with Lewis.

The home side lead the two-Test series 1-0 thanks to their 64-run win in the opening Test in Chittagong.

Ireland, Afghanistan to play ODIs, Test in Dehradun

IANIS
Dubai

Ireland and Afghanistan are all set to play three Twenty20 Internationals, five One-Day Internationals and a one-off Test in February-March next year in Dehradun, India, the ICC announced yesterday.

It will be Ireland's first overseas Test match, and the second Test match for the two newest teams at the highest level.

Earlier in 2018, Ireland started out at home against Pakistan, losing by five wickets, while Afghanistan took on India in Bengaluru and went down by an innings and 262 runs, according to the In-

ternational Cricket Council's website. The matches will be played at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium.

"The Afghanistan series is a major step forward for Irish cricket as the tour is our first major tour as a Full Member. It will no doubt be a test for the entire squad - taking on Afghanistan in subcontinent conditions will require a level of adjustment by both our batting and bowling units," Ireland batsman Andrew Balbirnie said after the itinerary was finalised.

"As we saw here at home in the summer, Afghanistan is a quality side with some world class players, and will be a great challenge in their 'home' conditions," he added.

BOTTOMLINE

Kohli backing gives Gower hope for Test cricket's future

AFP
London

The inexorable rise of Twenty20 cricket has sparked fears that the Test format is in serious jeopardy - but the longest form of the game has a powerful advocate in India captain Virat Kohli.

The popularity of quickfire T20 matches can be seen most starkly in the Indian Premier League, where players earn vast sums of money playing in front of packed houses.

Tests by contrast - outside England and Australia - are often played in front of sparse crowds in big, echoing arenas.

But former England captain David Gower said comments made by Kohli, the world's top-rated batsman, during India's 4-1 Test series loss in England this year, are significant.

"We had a fantastic series against India, closer than the margin suggests," said Gower, one of the leading Test batsmen of his era, during the inaugural Ranji Memorial Public Conversation on Cricket in London.

"It is a reflection of the bal-

ance of power if Virat says that - you've got a lot of people who will listen," explained Gower, who said the introduction of a World Test Championship from next year will help provide greater context for matches.

Kohli insisted Test cricket was the "most beautiful format of the game" despite the razzmatazz and hype around the shorter formats.

And no one should doubt what it would mean to Kohli were he to lead India to their inaugural Test-series win in Australia during an upcoming four-match campaign.

He is, though, against matches in the 141-year-old format being reduced to a maximum of four days from five to make them more attractive - England are playing a four-day match against Test newcomers Ireland in July.

INDIAN WEALTH

India are the undisputed financial powerhouse of world cricket, with an audience of more than a billion people providing huge commercial and broadcast revenues.

Tours by India boost opponents' bank balances, allowing home boards to sell TV rights to the lucrative subcontinental market.

Former India wicketkeeper Farokh Engineer said the Board of Control for Cricket in India had been "blinded" by Twenty20 to the detriment of an overall vision.

"India have been sort of blinded by the T20, the IPL," said Engineer, speaking alongside Gower. "Your first priority is to play for your country and then the riches will come automatically."

That Engineer played 46 Tests in just over 13 years while recently retired England batsman Alastair Cook made 161 Test appearances in 12-and-a-half years is an indication of just how congested the international calendar has become.

Engineer's fellow panel member Mushtaq Mohammad said it was crucial to make Test cricket affordable and that spectators risked being priced out of the game.

"If you want Test cricket to survive you've got to reduce the entrance fee. Open the gates, let the people come in, make it affordable."

As for the recent innovation of day-night Tests, the former Pakistan batsman added: "In Southeast Asia we've got the right weather for day-night cricket but don't reduce it (Test

cricket)."

Test cricket has suffered a marked decline in the West Indies, who dominated Test cricket from the late 1970s until the early 1990s, playing with a crowd-pleasing swagger.

Gower said reviving five-day interest in the Caribbean was no easy task despite a significant cash injection from the International Cricket Council.

"If you are talking about the Caribbean, you are not talking about one nation but several nations," he said. "You are talking about socio-economic problems and it's disjointed."

Of some consolation to traditionalists is that the debate is nothing new, with Test cricket still alive and kicking.

"In this ultra-modern age, counter-attractions have multiplied many times....They (young people) just haven't the time to devote to cricket or is it they just can't be bothered to dash home to tea, then to the local cricket ground?"

It might sound like a contemporary lament, but those words were written by England great Herbert Sutcliffe after his country's 1950-51 Ashes Test series loss in Australia.



MOTORSPORT

QMA welcomes a new generation of young riders

By Sports Reporter
Doha

More than 200 children registered to take part in the activities of the Family Open Day programme at Qatar Motorsport Academy (QMA) on November 23 and 24.

Last month Losail Circuit Sports Club (LCSC), Dorna Sports SL and Aspire Academy joined forces and launched the QMA which gives young riders between the ages of 8 and 16 years, the opportunity to learn from the experts, improve their skills and abilities, and work their way to becoming a world champion.

Registrants were made up of 17% Qatari children and there were a total of 25 nationalities represented among all the children. The briefing that took place after registration was given by LCSC General Manager and Vice-President Khalid al-Remaihi, Head of Development Program at Aspire Academy Richard Tremere and Head of QMA Jose Luis Cardoso before heading to the practical sessions.

There is a specific criteria which the children need to fit in order for them to be accepted so after the final selection, the more capable will be chosen to



Head of Development Program at Aspire Academy Richard Tremere and Head of QMA Jose Luis Cardoso with QMA children. (Right) LCSC General Manager Khalid al-Remaihi addressing the riders as Cardoso looks on.



enter the QMA. This will give the coaches more opportunity to focus individually on the riders and to let them progress at a steadier pace and at a more advanced level.

Al-Remaihi said: "We are very happy to kick-start the Qatar

Motorsports Academy activities. We have worked very hard, with the help of Dorna Sports SL and Aspire Academy, to make this project a reality."

"We are delighted with the response we have received, with more than 200 children pre-

registering for Academy. Of course, the Academy capacity is less than this number and we will have to carefully choose who stays with the Academy. It is really nice to see the excitement of all the children that joined us today and amazing to share this

experience with all of them," he said. Speaking on the occasion, Cardoso said: "I am very happy to see many kids at the beginning of our Academy. It has been a few months of hard work, enthusiasm and desire to see our goals fulfilled. The participation

of our riders has been incredible and I am sure that we will enjoy passing our experience on to the kids. Thanks to all the team for the great work done."

Qatar's rider Saeed al-Sulaiti, one of the QMA coach said, "I'm very happy because we've been

waiting for an academy like this for a long time. Having partners like Dorna and Aspire is a guarantee for all of us and this great project. I did not expect to have so much demand from the beginning so I am very happy about it."

GOLF

Reed and Cantlay share Hero World Challenge lead

'It was a lot of fun out there today shooting eight birdies'

AFP
Nassau, Bahamas

Masters champion Patrick Reed and Patrick Cantlay made the most of benign conditions Thursday, firing seven-under 65s to share a three-shot lead at the Hero World Challenge.

Reed, and coming off recent appearances in Dubai and Hong Kong, produced eight birdies and just one bogey to join Cantlay, who opened his first appearance in the \$3 million event hosted by Tiger Woods with a flawless seven-birdie display on the Albany course.

"It was a lot of fun out there today shooting eight birdies," Reed said. "At this time of year, many guys are looking for the year to end and go into the off-season and the way my schedule panned out in having Dubai and then Hong Kong and here, I am able to work on some things and really just trying to finish off the whole year off right."

"It will make that little break we get feel a whole lot better."

Cantlay, 26, was added to the elite 18-man field just a fortnight ago and arrived off a gallant runner-up finish in defense of his Shriners Hospitals for Children Open. The Californian indicated he would be donating \$500 for each of his birdies this week to the Californian Wildfire Relief Fund - translating to \$3,500 on the first day.

"I really feel for those people, just seeing the devastation," Cantlay said of those affected by the two deadly fires that ravaged areas in northern and southern California this month.

"I mean, there are a couple different fires and seeing just the whole towns getting wiped out - just doing a little bit to help," he said. "I felt like I could do it and I'm happy to help."

Sweden's Henrik Stenson also had seven birdies seven birdies but with three bogeys found himself sharing third place on four-under par with Ryder Cup rival Dustin Johnson.

Johnson was even through 10 holes before nabbing four birdies in five holes from the 11th

Presidents Cup captain Woods says cleared air with Reed



Team USA's Tiger Woods and Patrick Reed during the Ryder Cup at Le Golf National - Guyancourt, France, on September 28, 2018. (Reuters)

Tiger Woods has cleared the air with Patrick Reed in the wake of controversial comments the U.S. Masters champion made following the American team's Ryder Cup loss in September, the 14-times major winner said on Thursday. Speaking after the first round at the Hero World Challenge, an event he hosts in the Bahamas, Woods addressed an issue that could affect the harmony on the U.S. team he will captain at next year's Presidents Cup in Australia. Woods would

not divulge exact details of his conversation with Reed, who rocked the Ryder Cup team boat when he publicly complained that his historically successful pairing with Jordan Spieth had been disbanded in the Paris defeat. Reed told the *New York Times* that he had been "blindsided" when captain Jim Furyk opted against pairing him with Spieth, the 28-year-old instead playing and losing twice with Woods as a fractious U.S. team was well beaten by Europe. "We

spoke after the Ryder Cup for a long period of time and, you know, we talked amongst us and it will stay between us," Woods said of his conversation with Reed, who is co-leader in the Bahamas after firing a seven-under 65. Woods and Reed could yet team up at the Presidents Cup, with the former hoping to compete as a playing captain, saying he would take part if he qualified automatically and left open the option of selecting himself if he did not.

Now, if I don't make it on points, then it's up to myself, my vice-captains and the rest of the players who are already on the team, who is the best suited to play," he said. "If we find, if we think that it's someone else, then I don't play. It will be a team decision on who are the next four picks." Woods also implied that he was not happy with the date of next year's World Challenge, currently scheduled the week before the December 12-15 Presidents Cup.

through the 15th. Stenson played alongside close friend Justin Rose after the two sorted out a wardrobe dilemma that saw them both arrive at the course wearing similar burgundy coloured shirts.

"Justin was gracious enough to arrange for his wife to bring a new blue coloured shirt and even thought the new shirt looked much better on him than the first," Stenson said. "Besides not everyone can wear this burgundy colour as well I did today."

WOODS STRUGGLES
Tournament host Woods was in

less jovial mood after a one-over par 73 that left him sharing 16th place.

Woods had revealed during Wednesday's pro-am he was struggling with a 102-degree fever after picking up a "bug" from his son, Charlie.

While he said he was "feeling a lot better" on Thursday, Woods was spotted affixing a bandage to the back of his left ankle at the 11th tee.

"It's been a long week or so dealing with what I have," the 14-time major winner said. "At least this tournament is now started and we've got it under-

way, so that I'm now back into the rhythm of playing again, which is nice.

"As for my ankles, I've struggled with them the last few months and they've just been sore. Just wear and tear."

Woods had four birdies along with two bogeys and a triple-bogey six at the par-three 12th, where his tee shot came to rest well below the green inside a lateral hazard and just short of water that guards the entire left side of the hole.

Woods's second shot ran back down the green and into the water from where he took a penalty

drop on route to chipping his fourth to the green and two-putting.

SCORES FROM FIRST ROUND
65-Patrick Cantlay, Patrick Reed 68-Henrik Stenson (SWE), Dustin Johnson 69-Bubba Watson, Alex Noren (SWE) 70-Justin Thomas, Justin Rose (ENG), Bryson DeChambeau 71-Keegan Bradley, Jon Rahm (ESP), Jason Day (AUS) 72-Tony Finau, Gary Woodland 73-Xander Schauffele, Rickie Fowler, Tiger Woods 74-Hideki Matsuyama (JPN)

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar Manateq Rally 4th round today

QNA
Doha

The fourth round of the Qatar Manateq Rally will be held today, with the participation of prominent local drivers as well as drivers from Kuwait, Oman and Russia.

It is expected that the fourth round will witness a strong competition from 11 teams to win the three categories (T1, T2 and T3), where Sheikh Hamad bin Eid al-Thani, is the most prominent drivers to win the title with the levels of excellence presented in the previous rounds, as well as his long experience in this tournament.

Sheikh Hamad leads the championship after three rounds, with 45 points, five

points ahead of the driver Adel Hussein absent from this round and ranked second.

Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) has scheduled the race at 9:30 morning today in front of the rally venue at Lusail Multi-Purpose Hall, with the finish line also in the same place at 6:00pm, which will witness the crowning ceremony of the winners of the first three places of the tour.

Two rounds of the tournament are scheduled and will be held after the end of the fourth round. The fifth round will be held on December 21 and 22, and the sixth and final on January 18 and 19, 2019.

The first and second round were held on the sidelines of the Qatar Desert Rally, and the third round was held mid-October.

FOCUS

Officials defend 'The Match' as critics circle

AFP
Hong Kong

Top golf officials have given their backing to the \$9 million head-to-head showdown between Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson after critics called it demeaning and even outdated. Martin Slumbers, chief executive of the R&A, which helps govern golf and set its rules, told AFP that alternative formats like "The Match" helped the sport reach new audiences.

Mickelson won \$9 million in the one-round, winner-takes-all exhibition in front of an invitation-only crowd in Las Vegas last week.

Neither player was in need of the money, as Mickelson is second only to Woods on the all-time list of golf's highest earners, according to various estimates.

"I think different forms of the game are really important," Slumbers said, at this week's Sports Connects conference at the Mission Hills golf resort in Dongguan, southern China.

"I think we have to embrace all these different types of the game. If that brings more people into it then I think that's great," he added.

Arjun Chowdri, senior director of the PGA of America, also said the high-profile match-up between the long-time rivals was a

"great idea". "I love it because it's the idea of responsible disruption," he told the conference at the Mission Hills golf resort in Dongguan.

"I think it's a great idea, it's good for the sport... it's different, it doesn't take away from the sport - it just brings more people in."

However, not all reactions have been positive. Golf Channel analyst Brandel Chamblee said The Match "shined a light on the greedy - not the charitable side of golf - and put its two biggest stars in a position to fail."

"Let's call this affair in Las Vegas what it really was: two stars trying to rehabilitate their images, that had little initial gravity and failed to generate its own energy when neither Tiger nor Phil could find authentic motivation in the carnival atmosphere," Chamblee wrote.

"The Match may grow the game, just as weeds grow on your lawn... The Match was not transcendent, it was transparent, and it demeaned the game. Period."

Tenniel Chu, vice-chairman of Mission Hills, said "we started that (format) way before" when he hosted Woods against Rory McIlroy in the 'Match at Mission Hills' in 2013.

"I feel like it's a bit outdated... I think it's a bit overdone already," Chu told AFP.

FOCUS

Despite losing title, 'Fabi' scores big with St. Louis chess fans

He may have lost to Carlsen, but his hometown club believes Caruana will still be dominating the game when the next world championship rolls around in 2020

By Leah Thorsen
St. Louis Post-Dispatch (TCA)

The final face-off of the world chess championship in London lasted more than three hours, and Sadiya Ahmad watched nearly every move from a seat at the St. Louis Chess Club.

She's a member of the club where Fabiano Caruana, the second-highest ranked chess player in the world, competes in tournaments. On Wednesday, she stared intently at a large TV screen showing a livestream of the match in which Caruana, 26, fought to become the first American since Bobby Fischer in 1972 to achieve the title of world champion.

"I want him to win. I'm praying very, very hard that he wins," said Ahmad, a graduate student at St. Louis University studying computer science.

But Magnus Carlsen, a Norwegian grandmaster, successfully defended his world title for the third time on Wednesday, besting Caruana in rapid tiebreaker games that followed 50 hours of play that ended without a winner.

After their three-week match ended in 12 draws, Carlsen wrapped up victory quickly with three straight wins to build an unassailable lead in the best-of-four rapid format. The tiebreakers were played with 25 minutes for each player per game, while the 12 previous classical-style games lasted up to seven hours each.

"I was hoping to play my best chess today, but I didn't even come close to that," said Caruana, who was born in Miami, raised in Brooklyn and lives in St. Louis. "I felt a lot of pressure, but I don't think I had added pressure because I was the first American challenger in a long time. I think the match naturally comes with a lot of pressure."

Those who know Caruana in St. Louis cheered for him Wednesday, although the odds



US chess player Fabiano Caruana (right) attends a press conference after his loss in the tie-breaker for the 2018 World Chess Championship against world chess champion Magnus Carlsen (left) of Norway in London on Wednesday. (AFP)

were not his favour. Carlsen, 27, has been the world's top-ranked player since age 19.

"How's he doing?" asked Lt. Dan Zarrick, a St. Louis police officer who also works a security job at the chess club when off-duty, as he popped inside the Central West End chess club to check on the game.

Zarrick, who had followed the championship play online in recent weeks, described Caruana, who's known affectionately as Fabi, as a humble, nice guy.

Among those who watched the championship Wednesday at the club was its benefactor Rex Sinefield, the retired investor who had a big part in bringing Caruana here to St. Louis.

"This is bigger than the founding of St. Louis," Sinefield quipped of Caruana's success in making it to the world championship.

The livestream showed a play-by-play of the game led by chess grandmasters Jennifer Shahade, Yasser Seirawan and Maurice Ashley, who meticulously dissected each move from a broadcast studio in the club's basement with commentary that rivaled the buoyancy and colour of any network sports broadcaster.

"You gotta play some funky moves," said Ashley, saying it doesn't work to play "trash" against a guy like Carlsen.

Tony Rich, the club's executive director, was in London for the championship, providing live relays of each move to be included in the livestream with their analyses.

"It's way above me," said Ross Larson of Bridgeton, who recently retired and is playing chess after decades away from the game, of the complex play he saw on the

chess club's screen.

Larson said he was glad for the attention that Caruana was bringing to the chess scene in St. Louis, and that spotlight isn't expected to wane.

Sinefield is among those who thinks Caruana will still be dominating the game when the next world championship rolls around in 2020.

"Fabi is not going anywhere," Sinefield said. "He'll be back in two years."

Wednesday's championship was the third time Carlsen has successfully defended his title after winning it from Viswanathan Anand of India in 2013. By dominating the tiebreakers, the Norwegian justified his decision to offer a draw in the 12th classical game on Monday despite having a superior position — refusing to take the risk of going for a win and staking

his title on his ability to outplay Caruana in speed chess.

That draw offer had been harshly criticized by other top grandmasters, including chess legend Garry Kasparov, who called it "shocking." Another former world champion, Vladimir Kramnik, said it was "absurd".

But Carlsen said he had no regrets.

"Based on my chances today it was correct. As for the opinions of Garry and Vlad, they're entitled to their stupid opinions, that's all I can say," Carlsen said. "I understand that that's not the mindset that everybody wants, but that's what I felt gave me the best chance of winning the match."

Carlsen pockets 550,000 euros (\$621,000) for the win while Caruana gets 450,000 euros (\$508,000).

SPORT MEETS SCIENCE

Argentine polo turns to genetics to produce champions

AFP
Buenos Aires

Are champions born, or raised? That's the question scientists in Argentina are trying to answer as they look to pinpoint the genes that make local horses the best in the world for playing polo.

In Argentina, polo is a big deal, and big business, and to that end, cloning has already been used to reproduce the finest existing mounts.

But scientists want to go one step further and map the entire genome of the Argentine polo horse in order to create the perfect specimen.

From December, a group of five universities will analyse 80,000 horses from the breed as part of a project that will try to identify the ideal genetic balance that makes up a polo horse.

The Argentine horses used to play polo have been bred specifically over decades by crossing a Criollo line descended from the original pure-blooded Andalusian and Arab mounts brought to the New World by Spanish conquistadores, and English thoroughbreds, introduced at the end of the 19th century when British immigrants also imported polo.

Sebastian Demyda, one of the project's leaders.

This includes every biotechnological technique from embryonic transfer to cloning and gender selection: mares are preferred because of their more docile temperament.

Argentina's polo association accepts cloning — although not everyone considers this ethical, and one private clinic specialising in embryo manipulation has ceased its activities.

"(Genetic) engineering is the limit," said Buchanan, who believes tampering with individual embryos is a step too far.

Cloning however has become common practice in polo — and while clones were initially used only for reproductive purposes, now they are used in competition too.

Elite players can have up to six or seven clones in their pens. "The clones are doing very well, they're winning prizes," said Demyda.

But cloning has its drawbacks, not least when it comes to the gene pool.

"Clones narrow the race's genetic structure, they're like a photocopy," said Demyda.

When it comes to the sport, they also distort the playing field. Cloning costs a minimum of \$30,000 meaning only the richest can benefit.



Researchers of the Genetics Veterinary Institute (IGEVE) conduct tests on a polo horse in La Plata, Argentina, earlier this month. (AFP)

For veterinarian Guillermo Buchanan, the Argentine polos "are unique" because of their speed and durability, and because of their mix of explosive-ness and docility.

During a polo match these horses, also known as polo ponies due to their agility, "change direction at speed, slow down, turn, accelerate while turning," says admiring horse-breeder Pablo Trigo, who is also co-managing the project.

The Argentine polos distinguish themselves in their rate of learning and sensibility to their rider's desires. They are the most cloned animal in the world.

At stud farms in the Buenos Aires area they are looked after as if works of art. And now science is being used to figure out how to reproduce the finest animals.

The project is expected to start producing results within three years and will precede the launch of a genetic selection program aimed at optimising the horses' physical and temperamental characteristics.

'CUTTING EDGE' RESEARCH

There's nothing new about using applied research and biotechnology to improve polo ponies but interest in the science is growing, as is the money people are prepared to pay for its results.

The clone of a legendary mare fetched a whopping \$800,000 at auction.

According to estimates, there are around 200 cloned Argentine polos, many copies of elite level mounts.

So far, all seem to be in excellent health.

Argentina "is absolutely at the cutting-edge of applied research into polo ponies," said geneticist

"Cloning isn't available to everyone, it's very expensive and gives certain breeders an advantage."

'SPECIAL CONNECTION' NEEDED

While science can help favor certain physical and even temperamental traits at birth, training maintains a crucial and almost mythical role in the development of polo horses.

It can take seven years to train a polo pony as it needs to be programmed into acting against its natural instincts.

Specialist Ezequiel Correa says "what's fundamental is that it has been well tamed," although without using violence.

A horse needs to get used to the swinging wooden mallet brushing its sides, and the sound when it connects with the metal ball.

"It's a painstaking art form that requires small steps of just 20 minutes training a day."

"It's like teaching a child to read one letter at a time. If you make it read in front of the class, you traumatise it," said Correa, who at 33 has trained 20 horses.

"If you expose a horse to polo before it's ready, you traumatize it and it's difficult to come back from that."

Once that's been achieved, though, the next step is to establish "chemistry" between horse and rider.

"You need a special connection, there's a unique form of communication using the legs. If it works, you can have a champion."

Science, it seems, cannot overcome every challenge. "No-one can identify the new (Lionel) Messi by genes," said Demyda.

SPOTLIGHT

War on football? Chinese players get army drills, 'thought education'

AFP
Shanghai

Chinese national squads and a top league team have packed young footballers off to military camps for drills and Marxist-style "thought education" as a campaign to promote Communist Party values spreads even into the sporting world.

Chinese fans have watched the militarisation of football with a mixture of anger and bemusement after pictures emerged of players getting their hair shaved and throwing themselves bare-chested into the snow.

The Chinese Football Association (CFA) spirited away more than 50 under-25 national squad players in October for several weeks of intensive army drills, swapping their football boots for combat boots and military fatigues.

The move, underlining desperation to improve the perennially underachieving Chinese national side, was particularly controversial because it meant some of China's finest young players were not involved in the final games of the league season.



Shanghai Shenhua players are inspected by a soldier during military-style training sessions at the team's training ground in Shanghai on Tuesday. (AFP)

A second batch of players was packed off in early November, and this week a national squad of under-19s was set to don camouflage and head to the barracks, suggesting that the boot camps may become a fixture.

Chinese Super League (CSL) side Shanghai Shenhua — home last year to Argentine striker Carlos Tevez — followed suit with its under-19 players, combining football training with marching and other aspects of an austere military life.

Under the watchful eye of

the drillmasters of airforce unit 94778, the young players were subjected on Monday to "thought-education", the club said on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform.

They "examined propaganda materials, visited the unit's hall of history, soldiers' barracks and took part in basic military formation drills", it said.

The players were also plunked down to watch the evening news on state television — a nightly hymn to the Communist Party — before hitting their bunks.

'STRENGTHEN IDEOLOGY'

The CFA has been characteristically coy on the thinking behind the boot camps, but the Beijing Evening News said: "In several previous warm-up matches, some of the national team were criticised for not working hard and having no sense of honour."

The Beijing Youth Daily, citing the CFA, said that the camps will "strengthen young players' ideology".

President Xi Jinping has conducted a broad campaign to bolster the ruling Communist Party that has drawn comparisons to past mass political campaigns under former leader Mao Zedong.

Government departments, businesses and organisations across the country have signed up to the drive by conducting indoctrination sessions focusing on Marxist values and "Xi Jinping Thought".

Earlier this year, players for the national team began appearing in matches with bandages covering their tattoos, which the Xi government frowns upon in its purity campaign.

But frustrated Chinese football fans accused the CFA of putting politics before football as it took dozens of domestic

players out of action for the critical last few games of the season.

Pictures subsequently emerged online of the under-25 players with buzz cuts and wearing military garb as they sat in a whitewashed room watching the senior national team's 0-0 with India on television.

A red banner at the front of the room exhorted them to be upstanding members of the public.

Soccer News reposted pictures on Weibo said to be of the players baring their teeth and leaping half-naked into the snow.

China's World Cup-winning coach Marcello Lippi, whose final assignment with the team will be the Asian Cup in January, has not commented on the army-style initiative.

As part of Xi's efforts to make the country a footballing powerhouse, China made the 70-year-old Italian one of the best-paid coaches in the world when they hired him in October 2016.

But after an initial bounce, the team have won just once in their last five games and are stewing in 76th in the FIFA rankings, two spots below war-torn Syria.

NBA

Raptors hold off Warriors; Lakers and Clippers win

'We were able to make shots, we were able to get some stops in OT. I'm happy we got the win'

AFP
Los Angeles

The Toronto Raptors withstood a 51-point performance from Kevin Durant to beat two-time defending champions Golden State 131-128 in overtime Thursday in a game billed as a possible NBA Finals preview.

Kawhi Leonard scored 37 points and Pascal Siakam added a career high 26 for the Raptors, who notched a seventh straight victory to improve their league-leading record to 19-4 in front of a jubilant home crowd.

"It's a building block for us," Leonard said. "We were able to make shots, we were able to get some stops in overtime. I'm happy we got the win."

The Warriors, playing without injured stars Stephen Curry and Draymond Green, fell to 15-8 as they endured their fifth straight road defeat.

They're a game behind Western Conference leaders the Los Angeles Clippers, who beat the Kings 133-121 in Sacramento on the second night of a back-to-back.

Elsewhere in the West, LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers bounced back from their biggest defeat of the season - a 117-85 loss to the Denver Nuggets - with a 104-96 victory over the Indiana Pacers.

After building a 23-point first-quarter lead the Lakers saw the Pacers battle back to briefly take the lead in the third quarter.

But James came through in the clutch, scoring 12 of his 38 points in the last five minutes.

"That's what I'm here for," said James, a three-time NBA champion who joined a developing Lakers team as a free agent prior to the season.

James had nine rebounds and seven assists as he rebounded from a season-low 14 points in the loss at Denver.

"LeBron was spectacular, but we got a lot of really good efforts from different people," Lakers coach Luke Walton said. "That's what it takes to win in this league."

Brandon Ingram scored 14 points and Josh Hart chipped in 13 for the Lakers, who notched their 10th win in 14 games.

In Toronto, Durant notched his third straight game of at least 40 points - a first in his career.

"Tonight we were down early, we were down big and I just tried to be aggressive and go get a bucket," said Durant, who also grabbed 11 rebounds and handed out six assists.

Klay Thompson added 23 points and Jonas Jerebko produced 16 of his 20 points in the fourth quarter and overtime as the Warriors erased a double-digit deficit only to come up short.

'INCREDIBLE GAME'
After Kyle Lowry's three-pointer with 56



Toronto Raptors forward Kawhi Leonard tries to get past Golden State Warriors forward Kevin Durant (No 35) on his way to the basket in the third quarter at Scotiabank Arena. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

seconds remaining in the fourth quarter put the Raptors up 119-113, Durant responded with two three-pointers, knotting the score at 119-119 with nine seconds left.

Coming out of a time out, the Raptors were unable to get a shot off before the final buzzer and it went to overtime.

Danny Green's three-pointer with 2:07 in the extra session put Toronto up 126-123 and the Warriors wouldn't get the deficit below three points from there - the Raptors stretching their lead when Lowry came up with a steal from Andre Iguodala and benefiting again when Iguodala was whistled for travelling.

RESULTS		
Toronto	131-128	Golden State
Lakers	104-96	Indiana
Clippers	133-121	Sacramento

"An incredible basketball game for the fans to watch," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said.

"We came up just short." The first half had offered little to predict the late-game drama as the Raptors jumped to an early lead.

Leonard made his first six shots of the contest, scoring 13 points in the first quar-

ter when Toronto out-scored the Warriors 38-25.

The Raptors led 67-58 at halftime. They took a 96-88 lead into the final period and were up by 10 with less than five minutes to play.

Despite the hype surrounding the early season clash with the reigning champs, Lowry - who finished with 10 points and 12 assists - said the victory shouldn't change Toronto's approach.

"It was a good challenge for us," he said. "We got a win. We've just got to keep going, stay level headed and take it as one game, one win and move on to the next one."

NHL

Hot-shooting Laine, Ehlers lead Jets past Blackhawks

Reuters
New York

Patrik Laine scored two goals, the 100th and 101st of his career, and Nikolaj Ehlers scored a hat-trick to lead the host Winnipeg Jets to a wild 6-5 victory over the Chicago Blackhawks on Thursday night.

Laine (20 years, 224 days old) also became the fourth-youngest player in NHL history to hit the 100-goal mark, behind only Wayne Gretzky (20 years, 40 days), Jimmy Carson (20 years, 116 days) and Brian Bellows (20 years, 179 days).

Laine also has 18 goals in November, making him the seventh player since 1989-90 to score 17 or more goals in a calendar month. Blake Wheeler and Mark Scheifele each had three assists, and Jacob Trouba added a goal and an assist for Winnipeg, which won for the second time in five games. Connor Hellebuyck had 26 saves.

Artem Anisimov and John Hayden each had a goal and an assist, and Marcus Kruger, Jan Rutta and Dominik Kahun also scored goals for Chicago, which lost for the fourth time in five games.

David Kampf added two assists, and Corey Crawford finished with 27 saves for the Blackhawks, who have allowed 14 goals in their last two games.

RESULTS

Columbus	4-2	Minnesota
Ottawa	3-0	Rangers
Tampa Bay	5-4	Buffalo
Arizona	3-0	Nashville
Winnipeg	6-5	Chicago
Boston	2-1	Islanders
Edmonton	3-2	Los Angeles
Las Vegas	4-3	Vancouver

The teams traded four goals in the first 8:10 of the first period, with Laine starting the scoring with at the 1:43 mark. He put in a rebound of a Jacob Trouba shot.

Kruger tied it at 1 with a rebound goal of an Andreas Martinsen shot, but Winnipeg regained the lead just 49 seconds later on Ehlers' first goal of the game, a tip-in of a Wheeler shot.

Hayden tied it when he put in a rebound of a Kampf drive and shot. The Jets opened the second period with two goals 45 seconds apart, the first by Ehlers on a slap shot from the slot, and the second on a rebound by Trouba on a Wheeler shot. The Blackhawks then cut their deficit to 4-3 on Rutta's second goal of the season on a slap shot from the blue line that beat Hellebuyck on his glove side. Laine then scored again, giving him a league-leading 21 goals this season, on a power play at the 1:18 mark of the third period to give the Jets a 5-3 lead, stealing the puck near the bottom of the left circle and firing a wrist shot past Crawford.

Ehlers completed his hat trick when he intercepted an Erik Gustafsson crossing pass at the Blackhawks blue line and then went in on a breakaway and beat Crawford blocker side.

But Kahun and Anisimov answered with goals to cut it to 6-5. Crawford was taken out of the game with 1:45 to go, but Hellebuyck stopped Alex DeBrincat on a close-in shot on Chicago's best chance at tying the game.

Meanwhile Tampa Bay's Cedric Paquette scored the go-ahead goal with 5:41 remaining as the host Lightning snapped the NHL's longest winning streak at 10 games in a 5-4 win over the red-hot Buffalo Sabres on Thursday. Paquette ripped his fifth goal after a pass from Mikhail Sergachev to break a 4-4 tie.

Buffalo had not lost since dropping a 3-1 decision to the New York Rangers on Nov 4 at Madison Square Garden. The win vaulted the Lightning into the top spot in the Atlantic Division and Eastern Conference with 37 points in 26 games, passing divisional foes Buffalo and Toronto. Dan Girardi, Alex Killorn, Nikita Kucherov and Steven Stamkos also scored for the Lightning. Victor Hedman had two assists, and Killorn and Kucherov each added a helper.



Winnipeg Jets right wing Patrik Laine scores against Chicago Blackhawks goaltender Corey Crawford in the third period at Bell MTS Place. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

NFL

Cowboys end Saints' win streak with 13-10 upset

AFP
Los Angeles

The Dallas Cowboys defense delivered the goods Thursday, suffocating New Orleans quarterback Drew Brees and the Saints' high-octane offense in a 13-10 NFL victory.

The Cowboys, who strengthened their position atop the NFC East division, ended the Saints' 10-game winning streak, holding New Orleans to their lowest points total of the season.

New Orleans had a chance to snatch the win when Dallas quarterback Dak Prescott was stripped on a sack with 2:35 remaining. But Dallas cornerback Jourdan Lewis intercepted Brees to virtually end New Orleans' challenge.

The Cowboys were able to run down the clock with the help of a defensive pass interference call against the Saints' Mars-hon Lattimore.

The Cowboys had signalled their intentions early as New Orleans was held to three-and-outs on their first two possessions and had to punt on each of their first three drives.

Brees started the game 0-for-4 on passing attempts for the first time in his 18-year career. He was held to just 39 passing yards in the first half and 127 yards overall and was sacked twice.

"Good pass rush team," Brees said. "I felt like we didn't really find our rhythm

pretty much the whole game. We may have had one decent drive for the most part."

The Dallas defense held the Saints - who came into the contest averaging a league-leading 37.2 points per game - just 176 total yards. The defeat dropped New Orleans a half game behind the 10-1 Los Angeles Rams for best record in the NFC, with the Rams due to take on the Detroit Lions on Sunday.

The Saints' only touchdown came on a drive when the Cowboys were assessed a total of 41 penalty yards, including a 15-yard penalty for roughing the punter with two minutes left in the third quarter.

That gave New Orleans breathing room and three plays later Brees connected with Keith Kirkwood for a 30-yard TD that closed the gap to 13-10. "When the defense plays like that," Prescott said, "I mean, an incredible game."

Prescott himself completed 24 of 28 passes for 248 yards and a 16-yard touchdown pass to Ezekiel Elliott, who caught six passes for 60 yards.

Brett Maher booted field goals of 26 and 46 yards on either side of Elliott's touchdown as Dallas took a 13-0 lead into halftime - the first time the Saints had been held scoreless in the first half since a 38-17 loss to the Cowboys in 2014.

Wil Lutz's 33-yard field goal in the third quarter put New Orleans on the board before Brees connected with Kirkwood for their lone touchdown.



Dallas Cowboys cornerback Jourdan Lewis (second right) celebrates his fourth quarter interception against the New Orleans Saints. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

RUGBY

Clermont head to Montpellier to kickstart round of 11

AFP
Paris

One of the most humiliating weeks in the history of French rugby ends with a sliver of salvation as leaders Clermont head to last season's beaten finalists Montpellier to kickstart round 11 of the Top 14 today.

It is a golden chance for the cream of the French game to show that last weekend's horror show at the Stade de France when Les Bleus stumbled to defeat against Fiji was a mere aberration. Three members of the French squad – Louis Picamoles, Benjamin Fall and Kelian Galletier – are likely to feature in Vern Cotter's Montpellier side alongside their two returning Georgians, Misha Nariashvili and Levan Chilachava.

They will have to wait until next season for French captain Guilhem Guirado who confirmed his move from Toulon earlier on Thursday but they may have the bonus of Johan Goosen coming back after six weeks out with

an ankle injury. Goosen – who retired from the sport in 2016 before joining the Top 14 runners up this summer – was carried off the field on a stretcher in October's victory over Toulon. But the 13-time Springbok has made a good recovery and could face Clermont.

Montpellier, who are currently ninth just four points behind fourth-placed La Rochelle, face a Clermont who put four tries past Lyon in a 31-11 win last week without their internationals. The potential return of Camille Lopez, Rabah Slimani, Sebastien Vahaamahina and Arthur Iturria will only make them stronger. While it is a game to mend some reputations it is also a chance for others to build theirs, none more so than Clermont's Fijian-born wing Alveriti Raka who will receive his French citizenship on December 8, making him eligible for Jacques Brunel's side in the Six Nations.

EMERGING TALENT

Another player creeping on to Brunel's flanker Ryan Chapuis who will get a further chance to impress in tomorrow's

feature match against second-placed Toulouse. Chapuis has taken advantage of the injuries and absences this season to make a toehold in the Paris-based team. He has played a part in all 12 competitive games that Stade have played, starting nine, and has made a strong impression. "People didn't really believe in him," former France captain Pascal Pape who coached him at the Stade academy told sports daily L'Equipe.

"He isn't enormous physically and he is not the strongest. But he is the smartest. You have to be smart to succeed in today's rugby. You don't need to be able to lift four hundred pounds to progress, it is also in the head."

The other Parisian team Racing 92, third in the table seven points behind Clermont, also face an awkward weekend when they travel to La Rochelle who are one place and one point behind them – and unbeaten since the end of September. That game is an indication of the congestion in the top half of the table – only four points separate third-placed Racing from Montpellier in ninth. The bottom end of the table is a little clearer as Perpignan go into

round 11 with just four points and a record of: Won 0, Drawn 0, Lost 10.

And now there is talk of Irish fly-half Paddy Jackson leaving the club. According to reports in the French media, the former Ulster playmaker has been spotted talking to Lyon about the possibility of jumping ship should Perpignan go down. The Catalans, who were promoted in May as second division champions, are at home to Bordeaux-Bègles who are seventh and keen to stay in the hunt for the play-offs.

Once mighty Toulon have stumbled on hard times of late. With just three wins to their name they are twelfth but a win over Grenoble today would lift them above their opponents.

FIXTURES

(all times GMT):

TODAY

Montpellier v Clermont (1345), Lyon v Pau, Castres v Agen, La Rochelle v Racing 92 (all 1705); Toulon v Grenoble (1945)

TOMORROW

Perpignan v Bordeaux-Bègles (1130), Toulouse v Stade Français (1550)



Clermont's New Zealand full-back Isaia Toeava (second right) tries to escape a tackle during the French Top 14 rugby union match against and Lyon at The Michelin Stadium in Clermont-Ferrand, central France, on November 25. (AFP)

HOCKEY

Holder Australia make winning start at World Cup

Germany to take on Pakistan, while Netherlands meet Malaysia today



Australia's players celebrate after scoring a goal against Ireland at the 2018 Hockey World Cup in Bhubaneswar yesterday. (AFP)

FIH
Bhubaneswar

The third day of competition at the Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup Bhubaneswar 2018 saw Australia make a winning start to their title defence, while 17th ranked China claimed a stunning draw against England as the first Pool B matches of the competition were played.

The Australia versus Ireland match was a fascinating encounter, with the Green Machine producing a fine performance against the title holders.

Australia took a 1-0 lead in the contest when Blake Govers launched a powerful penalty corner drag-flick beyond Ireland 'keeper David Harte 11 minutes into the game, but it was a lead destined not to last.

Ireland stunned the Kookaburras in the second period when a high-quality attack was finished beautifully by Shane O'Donoghue, who produced terrific 3D skills to find a way past Aussie shot-stopper An-

drew Charter.

Australia marked the start of the third quarter in style, with Corey Weyer's stunning, defence-splitting pass from midfield being finished at the second attempt by Odisha player of the match Tim Brand, who had shown incredible athleticism to join the attack from defence. It proved to be the decisive blow, with Australia showing all of their class to control the latter stages of the match and get their World Cup title defence off to a winning start.

Match-winner Brand, who celebrated his 20th birthday on Thursday, said: "We played very well but so did Ireland. Great crowd and I couldn't have asked for anything better to celebrate my birthday. England is our next game and they're always a tough opposition. They're a great team. They're all quality. We'll do our homework and hopefully get the win."

"We always knew it was going to be a tough game, playing the world number one in the first game of the World Cup," said Ireland's Jonathan Bell after the

match. "I think we put in a great performance, obviously didn't get the result, but by and large I thought we executed our game plan pretty well so we can be proud of that. We still have a lot of improvements to make before a big game (against China) on Tuesday."

The day's other Pool B match saw England facing a China side that sits ten places below them in the FIH Hero World Rankings. Remarkably, it was the team from Asia that took the lead against a nation that has finished fourth in the two most recent editions of the World Cup, with Guo Xiaoping showing superb skills along the backline before flicking above right arm the onrushing George Pinner and into the goal just five minutes into the contest.

England responded well, with Mark Gleghorne's 14th minute penalty corner drag-flick levelling the scores after a strong passage of play from the Europeans. Two goal-less quarters followed, leaving China 15 minutes away from claiming the most surprising result of the compe-

tion so far. That all changed in the 48th minute when Liam Ansell stole possession from a China defender before unleashing a stunning backhand strike into bottom corner to give England a 2-1 lead.

However, there was to be one final twist in the tale. With less than two minutes remaining, China scored a dramatic equaliser thanks to a powerful penalty corner drag-flick from Du Talake, whose effort found a way into the England goal to give the competition's second lowest ranked team a terrific point in their first ever World Cup match.

The action continues on today with the teams in Pool D finally getting their respective campaigns underway. The Netherlands take on Malaysia, a team now coached by one of their most famous tacticians in the shape of Roelant Oltmans, at 1700, before Germany face Pakistan.

Speaking ahead of the Malaysia match, Netherlands coach Max Caldas said: "At every tournament playing your first match is always difficult. We haven't played Malaysia for

several years, so it's difficult to say what to expect. But we have done our homework and studied the team well. We respect the team of Malaysia. We are confident for our match tomorrow, but we also know we have to play a good match to beat them. We're enjoying being in India. The pitches are good, the stadium is impressive, and the people are very friendly and helpful. Now we want to enjoy the tournament."

Germany captain Martin Haner expressed his excitement about his team's opening fixture against Pakistan.

"It's great to play against a team with such a great history again. I haven't played against Pakistan for quite a while and it is always a challenge to play against such skilful players. We cannot wait to play in the Kalinga Stadium again in front of a hockey loving crowd. It's always special to start the first match of a big tournament. We've had a good preparation and we're confident that we are ready for a great opener against Pakistan."

FOCUS

Willemse available for France in Six Nations

AFP
Montpellier, France

Montpellier lock forward Paul Willemse will be available for France in the Six Nations after announcing yesterday that his French citizenship had been confirmed this week.

"Yesterday morning, I saw my name in the official journal," said Willemse at a press conference in France.

"I am very happy to be naturalised. I am now French even if I have to wait two to three weeks before receiving my passport. It's a great moment for me and my family."

Pretoria-born Willemse, who won the Under-20 World Cup with the Springboks in 2012, qualifies for French citizenship through residency having left his native South Africa to play for Top 14 side Grenoble in 2014.

The 26-year-old also announced yesterday that he had signed a new three-year deal which would keep him at Montpellier until 2022.

"I am going to stay here a long time," said Willemse. "In my head, I am truly French."

"The Springboks didn't need me and I don't need them. My life is now in France."

The former Blue Bull is the second player this month to an-

nounce his Frenchification, following Clermont's Fijian-born wing Aliverti Raka.

Weighing in at 135 kilos and standing 2.01 metres, Willemse has already attracted the eye of France coach Jacques Brunel.

Under current World Rugby rules, which demand a three-year residential period for a player before he can play for a country, Willemse could have played in the November Tests.

But Bernard Laporte, president of the French Rugby Federation, declared in December 2016 shortly after his election, to have "made the political decision not to play foreign players in the national team."

Laporte insisted that possession of a French passport was a requirement for the national team.

From January 1, 2021, players will only be allowed to represent a foreign country after they have been living and playing there for five consecutive years.

Given France's defeats to South Africa and Fiji there is every chance Willemse will make his debut in the Six Nations, making him a strong contender to go to the World Cup in Japan.

"For the moment I am only thinking about Montpellier and we will see when the squad is announced whether I will be involved in the Six Nations," said Willemse.



World Cup winning Springbok Drotske shot in robbery

Former Springbok hooker Naka Drotske was in critical condition in hospital yesterday after being shot during an armed robbery outside the South African capital Pretoria.

The 47-year-old, a member of the 1995 World Cup winning squad, was at his brother's property in Kameeldrift when three men broke into the house on Thursday evening, police told local media.

"There was a struggle whereby one of the men was shot at," police spokesman Kay Makhubele said.

Drotske suffered severe blood loss after being shot three times and was undergoing emergency treatment at the Netcare Montana hospital in Pretoria, reports said.

His business partner and fellow former Springbok Os du Randt was also at the scene of the robbery, but was unharmed.

"Naka was shot and is currently in critical condition in hospital. We wish him a speedy recovery," South African Rugby said on its Twitter feed. English club London Irish for whom Drotske played for two years tweeted its horror at his predicament.

"Our thoughts are with former London Irish player Naka Drotske after this shocking news, we wish him a speedy recovery," tweeted the club with a shamrock icon.

Drotske won 26 caps for South Africa, scoring three tries. He was reserve hooker when South Africa hosted and won the World Cup in 1995, making just the one appearance, one year after the end of apartheid.

He had become first choice hooker four years later when the Springboks reached the semi-finals, playing in five of their matches, losing to eventual winners Australia. He later coached his domestic team, the Cheetahs, before pursuing a business career.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Reds face Everton test as Tottenham take on Arsenal

'It is a game the fans want to win and one that we want to win. Three games in a week is going to be tough'

AFP
London

Liverpool face a derby clash against Everton as they lick their Champions League wounds while Tottenham travel to Arsenal with a spring in their step on a weekend of big-city derbies.

Jürgen Klopp's team lost 2-1 to Paris Saint-Germain in midweek, meaning their bid to reach the knockout stages in Europe will go to the last game against Napoli, while Spurs face the daunting task of beating Barcelona to progress.

But both clubs will have to put their continental ambitions to one side as they attempt to stay on the coat-tails of Pep Guardiola's Manchester City in the Premier League.

Chelsea take on Fulham and one of their former managers in another London derby but Claudio Ranieri's side will travel the short distance to Stamford Bridge with new-found confidence after arresting a run of six Premier League defeats.

Jose Mourinho's misfiring Manchester United play Southampton away after edging past Swiss side Young Boys into the Champions League knockout phase.

AFP Sports picks out some of the main talking points ahead of the weekend fixtures in the Premier League.



Liverpool's Daniel Sturridge comes on as a substitute to replace Roberto Firmino during their Champions League clash against AS Roma.

'Perfect' time to play Arsenal: Third-placed Spurs head to the Emir-

ates stadium buoyed by last week's 3-1 victory against Chelsea and their 1-0 win against Inter Milan in midweek,

which keeps alive their hopes of reaching the Champions League knockouts. Midfielder Harry Winks, who came

agonisingly close to scoring against Inter at Wembley when he hit the bar from distance, said it was the "perfect" time to play Arsenal after six straight wins in all competitions.

"It is going to be another difficult game, so we have to get right and physically prepared for it, because it is going to be another battle," said the England international.

"It is a game the fans want to win and one that we want to win. Three games in a week is going to be tough, but confidence is high."

Everton derby pain: Everton have a shocking record against city rivals Liverpool, not tasting victory in the derby since 2010 and failing to win at Anfield since 1999.

Marco Silva's task looks daunting tomorrow but Everton travel in hope after a solid start to the season that sees them in sixth, 11 points behind Klopp's team.

Liverpool, second in the table, come into the match smarting after their disappointing defeat in Paris and Klopp is expecting a tougher test from Everton than in previous seasons.

"This game is isolated from the season," he said. "It's a derby, it's at home. Everton are doing really well this season, they're a completely different cup of tea, I would say, to the last few years so it will be a tough one."

Time running out for misfiring United: Jose Mourinho appears to be flailing around for answers to his side's lack of fluency but getting nowhere despite a changing cast of characters.

He demoted Paul Pogba and Romelu Lukaku to the substitutes' bench for the match against Young Boys and Alexis Sanchez was missing from the squad entirely but United still failed to find any rhythm.

United are already seven points adrift of fourth-placed Chelsea and show no sign of putting together a run to haul themselves into contention to qualify next season's Champions League.

Midfielder Marouane Fellaini, who scored the late winner against Young Boys, said the mood in the camp was upbeat following the 1-0 win, despite United's patchy form this season.

"Criticism is part of football but we have to work," he said. "We are a team, we are together, and give everything too. Together we have to move forward and take the points."

Fixtures (1500 GMT unless stated)

Today
Crystal Palace v Burnley, Huddersfield v Brighton, Leicester v Watford, Manchester City v Bournemouth, Newcastle v West Ham, Southampton v Manchester United (1730)
Tomorrow
Chelsea v Fulham (1200), Arsenal v Tottenham (1405), Liverpool v Everton (1615)

LA LIGA

Uncertainty clouds Isco future as Real prepare for Valencia

AFP
Madrid

Santiago Solari called it a "sporting decision, nothing else" as if that made it better but he was only fanning the flames of what has become his first niggling problem at Real Madrid.

If Isco was injured, his absence from even the substitutes' bench for the Champions League win over Roma on Tuesday would hardly have warranted a second look, but Solari's tactical choice pointed to something deeper.

Solari had not picked him in any of his first five starting line-ups but three times brought him on, against Real Valladolid, Viktoria Plzen and Eibar.

Then, at the Stadio Olimpico, Isco was not involved at all, instead sitting in the stands, dropped beneath the likes of 20-year-old Federico Valverde, 21-year-old Javi Sanchez and 22-year-old Dani Ceballos.

Solari has demoted Keylor Navas fully below Thibaut Courtois in goal but Isco feels like the first marquee player to be significantly worse off under Madrid's new coach.

He underwent an appendix operation towards the end of September but the expected recovery time was only a month. He was also loyal to Lopetegui, who showed faith in him for Spain when Zinedine Zidane was ignoring him at Real Madrid.

"If they sack him, they should sack all of us," said Isco, when Lopetegui's job was on the line last month, a remark quickly rebuked by captain Sergio Ramos.

It has been suggested Solari took note and saw in Isco's comments the kind of cockiness some believe was the cause of the malaise under Lopetegui. But there was no suggestion of that in Italy.

"These are calls that you make in a certain moment," Solari said. "It was a sporting decision, nothing else. There are no guaranteed starters, or substitutes, in football. It is up to all players to be at 100 per cent, to make the coaches pick them."

The implication was a problem with attitude, which Marcelo, speaking close by in the stadium, hardly denied.



"We are all adults," he said. "You have to work. I do not say that Isco does not work but he must work and see why he is failing to play."

Perhaps Lopetegui's departure hit Isco harder than most. He might have felt he finally had a Real Madrid coach that believed in him, only for Solari to take over and put him back on the bench.

When Isco's future has looked uncertain, he has never been short of suitors. Manchester City, Juventus, Liverpool, even Barcelona, were reportedly trying to nab him before his latest contract renewal in September last year.

That deal included a reported release clause of 700 mn euros, not a figure usually attached to fringe players, but club support for Isco has not always chimed with confidence from the coach, whether it be Carlo Ancelotti, Rafa Benitez or Zidane.

When he left Malaga for 23mn euros (\$26.1mn) in 2013, the sense was Real were adding their own touch of Xavi Hernandez or Andres Iniesta, a Spanish midfielder from the next generation with technique, swagger and an eye for a pass.

But doubts have always lingered around his tactical discipline. A club documentary, 'Heart of the Thirteenth', about last season's Champions League triumph showed Zidane at half-time ordering Isco to play higher up, behind Liverpool's midfield. By the 61st minute, he was being replaced by Gareth Bale.

Questions will be asked again if he is left out of Saturday's La Liga game at home to Valencia, where Real will be hoping to prove their loss to Eibar last weekend was just a blip in an otherwise impressive revival.

Five points still remain between them and Barcelona, in second place, while only six separate the entire top seven, with Sevilla top and Alaves, Espanyol and Girona all well placed.

Atletico will go top if they beat Girona on Sunday but will instantly be leapfrogged by Barca, if the Catalans win at home to Villarreal.

Sevilla will trump both with a victory away to Alaves, a team who have already beaten Real Madrid this season and missed the chance to sit top of the pile when they last Friday. La Liga remains wide open.

Fixtures (times GMT)

Today
Celta Vigo v Huesca (1200), Real Valladolid v Leganes (1515), Getafe v Espanyol (1730), Real Madrid v Valencia (1945)
Tomorrow
Real Betis v Real Sociedad (1100), Girona v Atletico Madrid (1515), Barcelona v Villarreal (1730), Alaves v Sevilla (1945)
Monday
Levante v Athletic Bilbao (2000)

SPOTLIGHT

United's Sanchez facing long time out with injury

Reuters
Manchester

Manchester United's Alexis Sanchez will not play again this year and faces a long spell on the sidelines after sustaining a serious hamstring injury in training, manager Jose Mourinho said yesterday.

The Chile forward has not had a scan to determine the full extent of the damage, but Mourinho described the problem as an "aggressive muscular injury" that left the 29-year-old screaming in pain.

"No scans yet. But the player is experienced, the player knows what the injury is," Mourinho told a news conference ahead of his team's trip to face Southampton in the Premier League yesterday.

"Also, from the top of my experience, just the painful scream and the way the injury happened, I know it's going to be for a long time."

Mourinho said Sanchez's injury was more severe than the hamstring problem sustained by centre back Victor Lindelof against Crystal Palace on today, which is expected to keep the Sweden international out of action until Christmas.

"It's not the little muscular injury that in one week or 10 days the player is ready,

for me and also for Alexis, the feeling before the scans is that the grade is different than the (Victor) Lindelof one and the Lindelof one was not an easy one.

"I think Alexis has what I used to call an aggressive muscular injury... I don't want to risk by saying for how long he will be out but from my experience I would say he will not play this year."

Sanchez has struggled at United this season, scoring one goal in 12 appearances in all competitions so far.

He last started in their Champions League victory at Juventus on Nov 7 and came off the bench in subsequent league games against Manchester City and Crystal Palace before being dropped from the squad for Tuesday's Champions League win over Young Boys.

United are seventh in the Premier League with 21 points from 13 games ahead of the trip to Southampton's St Mary's Stadium and Mourinho says his side need more consistency if they are to close the gap to the top four.

"We want to improve our position in the table, we want to close the gap to the top four, we want to be smelling these positions, if not there then just behind then just smelling for the second part of the season," he added.

SERIE A

Ronaldo-powered Juve ready to step on gas

AFP
Milan

Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri has urged his side to step on the gas in December to tighten their grip on an eighth successive Serie A title before they turn their focus back to their Champions League pursuit in February.

The Italian champions booked their ticket to the knockout rounds of the elite European competition with a game to spare this week with Cristiano Ronaldo setting up Mario Mandzukic to score the only goal against Valencia.

Next up will be a trip to Tuscany side Fiorentina today, the first of six league

games before the end of 2018, which includes home games against European rivals Inter Milan and Roma in Turin.

"We have reached the first goal with Champions League qualification, now we must maintain the same energy throughout December," said Allegri.

Juventus are eight points ahead of second-placed Napoli, who were held to a goalless draw against bottom club Chievo last weekend.

But Allegri said: "We still have lots of matches to play, by dropping three points you might lose the championships in the end."

"We hope to bring all the trophies home."

For Fiorentina "the match against Juventus always remains the most impor-

tant of the year," warned Allegri.

Juventus have won six of their last seven Serie A matches against midtable Fiorentina, two points off the Europa League berths and coming off a run of five consecutive draws.

Juventus's strike force of Ronaldo, Paulo Dybala and Mandzukic are firing on all cylinders, with one of the trio on target in 13 consecutive games in all competitions.

Ronaldo has scored ten times in total, including five in four straight away games, with Mandzukic on seven and Dybala on six.

And Portuguese star Ronaldo will be looking to impress on the final weekend before the Ballon d'Or winner is announced in Paris.

Fiorentina's midfielder Jordan Veretout said there was a great sense of anticipation ahead of the arrival of the five-time Ballon d'Or winner.

"For us it will be a very difficult task because they were already very strong and with Ronaldo they have become even more so," said the French player.

"They really can win everything from the Scudetto to the Champions League. We'll have to leave everything on the pitch."

Brazilian left-back Alex Sandro is out for the champions with a muscular problem picked up against Valencia, with Emre Can still recovering from a thyroid operation, but winger Federico Bernardeschi is set to return.

Carlo Ancelotti's Napoli travel to

ninth-placed Atalanta on Monday with Inter Milan, a point behind the south-erners in third, facing a tricky trip to Roma after their Champions League defeat to Tottenham.

Roma progressed to the Champions League last 16, but Napoli and Inter will have to wait until the final round of games in mid-December.

"The Chievo game is the only one where we had a big drop in intensity," conceded Ancelotti after their 3-1 win over Red Star Belgrade in Europe.

"But we haven't done so badly, have we? There are some very strong teams behind us in the table."

Eusebio Di Francesco's Roma lost to Udinese to drop to seventh, and need to be wary of Inter striker Mauro Icar-

di who has scored five goals in his last three Serie A matches at the Stadio Olimpico.

Lazio, in fourth, will try to close the gap on the top three with a trip to Verona side Chievo, who are boosted by their performance in Naples.

Today
SPAL v Empoli (1400GMT), Fiorentina v Juventus (1700), Sampdoria v Bologna (1930)

Tomorrow
AC Milan v Parma (1130), Frosinone v Cagliari, Sassuolo v Udinese, Torino v Genoa (all 1400), Chievo v Lazio (1700), AS Roma v Inter Milan (1930)

Monday
Atalanta v Napoli (1930GMT)

FOOTBALL

Madrid's Bernabeu to host Libertadores final

AFP
Asuncion

South American football's governing body CONMEBOL confirmed yesterday that the twice-postponed Copa Libertadores final second leg between Argentine rivals River Plate and Boca Juniors will be played on December 9 at Real Madrid's Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

Originally scheduled for last weekend at River's Monumental stadium in Buenos Aires, it was postponed after some Boca players were injured when their team bus came under attack from their arch rivals' fans throwing projectiles.

Boca appealed to CONMEBOL's independent disciplinary committee to be awarded the trophy and have River expelled from the competition, but that was

also rejected on Thursday.

Instead, CONMEBOL hit River with a two-game stadium closure "that will be applied from 2019" in official continental competitions, and "a \$400,000 fine."

In a separate statement issued late Thursday, Boca Juniors said it "did not share" the arguments of the CONMEBOL disciplinary panel and planned to appeal.

CONMEBOL president Alejandro Dominguez said that Real president Florentino Perez had offered use of the Bernabeu "for free."

"Madrid is the city with the biggest Argentine population in the world, outside Argentina," said Dominguez.

"It's the 10th safest city in the world, it has the airport with the greatest connectivity, and it's a city with a football tradition."

He added that fans of both teams would be admitted to the Bernabeu, something that was



River Plate's fans clash with riot police after the match was postponed earlier this week.

not the case for the original clash.

Away fans have been barred from stadiums in Argentina since 2013 due to football-related violence that has seen more than 300 people killed in the last 50 years, according to one charity.

Dominguez had a message to the hooligans, known as barras in Argentina, should they be thinking off attending the match.

"The 'barras' should not even dream of going. There is no place for them."

"I'm sure the message that the fans are going to send is what the world is waiting for: that the good guys are going to win this time."

Several Boca players suffered cuts from broken glass and the effects of smoke inhalation following the bus attack on Saturday.

While CONMEBOL initially insisted the match would go

ahead, the two sides' presidents agreed to postpone the second leg for 24 hours.

But a day later, Boca refused to play again, insisting they would be disadvantaged, and the match was indefinitely postponed.

On Monday, Boca petitioned CONMEBOL to be awarded the victory but a day later, the governing body said the match would go ahead "outside Argentina."

The Buenos Aires rivals drew their first leg in early November at Boca's iconic Bombonera arena 2-2.

The choice of the Bernabeu means that both the Copa Libertadores and Champions League finals will be played in Madrid within six months of each other.

The final of Europe's premier club competition will be played at the home of Real's own city rivals Atletico Madrid, the Wanda Metropolitan, on June 1.

QNB STARS LEAGUE

Sailiya's top 4 chances hit after shock 1-0 defeat

Hussein Ali scores only goal of the match as Qatar Sports Club record rare win

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Hussein Ali scored the only goal of the match as Qatar SC defeated Al Sailiya 1-0 in the QNB Stars League yesterday.

The result didn't do much for Qatar SC as they stayed 10th on the table with 14 points, while Al Sailiya's chances of finishing the tournament in the top four suffered a hit.

Al Sailiya maintained their third spot with 25 points, although they could slip down to fourth if Al Rayyan beat Al Duhail tomorrow.

Al Sailiya continued to miss Rachid Tiberkanine due to suspension. The Moroccan spearhead, who joined them from Al Kharaitiyat at the start of this season, has been playing a great role in The Peregrines' good run.

Tiberkanine's absence was felt even as Fahad Yousef and Mohamed Mudather led their attack.

Qatar SC, who were without injured Cameroonian star striker Samuel Eto'o, surged ahead through Hussein's header off a Fadl Omar cross from the right.

Al Sailiya had a good chance to equalise in the 18th minute, but Mudather's shot was blocked by Qatar SC goalkeeper Jassim al-Hail.

Hussein created a chance for a second time in first-half injury time. However, he failed to connect the ball in the goalmouth after being set up again by Fadl from the right.



Qatar SC's Osama Omari attempts to bring down Al Sailiya's Magdi Musa during their QNB Stars League match yesterday.

Al Sailiya replaced Mudather with Meshaal al-Shammari in the second half. Yet, they could not find their footing.

Qatar SC wasted another chance in the 67th minute as Syrian striker Osama Omari sent his powerful shot straight to Al Sailiya goalkeeper Saoud al-Khater.

Saoud, who was in excellent form, produced a brilliant save to deny Fadl in the 85th minute.

Al Sailiya had beaten Qatar SC 2-0 in the first leg.

Meanwhile, hosts Al Ahli and Umm Salal played out a goalless draw. Al Ahli, who maintained their unbeaten run to seven matches remained fifth on 23 points, while Umm Salal retained their seventh position on 17.

As Umm Salal took time to settle down, Al Ahli created the first real chance in the 27th minute only to see it go waste after Umm Salal goalkeeper Baba Malik collected the ball after Mohsine Moutaouli failed to

connect a cross from the right by Abdelrahman Mohamed.

Two minutes later, Mohsine shot over the bar, this time Mohamed Muntari doing the spadework from the right.

For Umm Salal, strikers Yanick Sagbo and Mahmoud al-Mawas made feeble attempts as the first half drew to a close.

Umm Salal showed more vigour in the second session. Sagbo had a chance, but he failed to connect the ball.

Al Ahli's Mohamed Tre-

sor headed a Mohsine corner straight to Malik in the 67th minute, while Khalil Sherief missed a sitter off a Muntari cross from the left in the 74th.

Umm Salal's attack lacked teeth, with Sagbo and al-Mawas being off-colour.

Al Ahli replaced Muntari with Ali Qaderi with more than 10 minutes left in the game in their bid to make a breakthrough.

The final few minutes saw hectic action, but the stalemate continued.

SPOTLIGHT

Arsenal and Chelsea power on in Europa League



Vorskla's Kosovo defender Ardin Dallku (C) vies for the ball with Arsenal's English striker Eddie Nketiah (L), next to Vorskla's Ukrainian defender Taras Sakiv (R), during the UEFA Europa League Group E football in Kiev.

AFP
Paris

Londoners Chelsea and Arsenal both enjoyed high-scoring Europa League wins on Thursday as Glasgow giants Celtic and Rangers were left with work to do on the final matchday to qualify for the next stage.

Unai Emery selected a youthful Arsenal to play in the Ukraine and they romped past Vorskla Poltava 3-0, guaranteeing top spot in Group E in a match switched to freezing Kiev after security concerns in the east of the country.

Teenagers Emile Smith Rowe and Joe Willock scored either side of an Aaron Ramsey penalty as the Gunners went in 3-0 at half-time.

Vorskla Poltava's coach had complained that the switch forced by UEFA had deprived the city of a "holiday", and had also distracted his players.

Arsenal will now avoid any of the Champions League drop outs in the draw for the next round as they have a better head-to-head record with second-placed Sporting Lisbon.

Maurizio Sarri had demanded a reaction from his Chelsea side after they lost at Tottenham in the Premier League and the Blues answered his call, beating PAOK Salonika 4-0 to win their group with a brace from French target man Olivier Giroud.

"The main target was to win, we needed a strong team reaction and we did it well tonight," said the World Cup winner Giroud.

"I am really happy with the team spirit and we can move forwards now and start some new momentum."

"I've scored goals in the past but it's true that I was waiting for more chances," said Giroud, who broke a long streak without a goal in the last round.

"You need a bit of luck in front of goal. I had a good assist from my team-mates, I love this kind of ball behind the defence."

"Four goals plus a clean sheet, a good night for us. When the manager starts me I try to give my best, do my part."

Celtic still need a final day draw to go through after beating pointless Rosenborg away for the second year in a row thanks to Scott Sinclair's emphatic header just before the break.

The Scots can thank Austrian outfit RB Salzburg, who won Group B outright with a victory over their German sister club RB Leipzig 1-0. The Germans now have to win in Glasgow to qualify ahead of Celtic.

Rangers drew 0-0 at home with Spain's Villarreal, keeping their hopes of last day qualification from Group G alive a point behind the Spaniards and Rapid Vienna who are both on seven.

RESULTS

Group A

Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Weiser 85) Ludogorets Razgrad 1 (Marcelinho 69)
FC Zurich 1 (Khelifi 74) AEK Larnaca 2 (Giannou 38, Tricovski 85)

Group B

Salzburg 1 (Gulbrandsen 74) RB Leipzig 0
Rosenborg 0 Celtic 1 (Sinclair 42)

Group C

Bordeaux 2 (De Preville 49, Kounde 90+5) Slavia Prague 0
Zenit St. Petersburg 1 (Mak 59) FC Copenhagen 0

Group D

Anderlecht 0 Spartak Trnava 0
Fenerbahce 0 Dinamo Zagreb 0

Group E

Qarabag 1 (Zoubir 14) Sporting Lisbon 6 (Dost 5-pen, Fernandes 20, 75, Nani 33, Diaby 65, 82)

Vorskla Poltava 0 Arsenal 3 (Smith-Rowe 11, Ramsey 27-pen, Willock 41)

Group F

AC Milan 5 (Cutrone 21, Stelvio 66-og, Calhanoglu 70, Schnell 78-og, Borini 81)
F91 Dudelange 2 (Stolz 39, Turpel 49)

Real Betis 1 (Canales 39) Olympiakos 0

Group G

Spartak Moscow 1 (Ze Luis 20) Rapid Vienna 2 (Muellder 80, Schobesberger 90+1)

Rangers 0 Villarreal 0

Group H

Apollon Limassol 2 (Faupala 31, Markovic 82) Lazio 0
Eintracht Frankfurt 4 (Jovic 1, 67, Luiz Gustavo 17-og, Sarr 62-og) Marseille 0

Group I

Malmo 2 (Lewicki 65, Antonsson 67)
Genk 2 (Pozuelo 42, Paintsil 53)

Sarpsborg 2 (Muhammed 1, Heintz 6)
Besiktas 3 (Lens 62, 90, Vagner Love 66)

Group J

FK Krasnodar 2 (Gazinskiy 49, Ari 57)
Akhisar 1 (Serginho 24)

Standard Liege 1 (Djenepo 62) Sevilla 0

Group K

Astana 0 Dynamo Kiev 1 (Verbic 29)
Jablonec 0 Rennes 1 (Grenier 55)

Group L

BATE Borisov 2 (Signevich 22, Ivanic 85)
FC Fehervar 0
Chelsea 4 (Giroud 27, 37, Hudson-Odoi 60, Morata 78) PAOK 0

BOTTOMLINE

Barcelona send Umtiti to Doha for knee treatment



Atletico Madrid's French forward Antoine Griezmann (R) and Atletico Madrid's Spanish midfielder Koke try to calm down Barcelona's French defender Samuel Umtiti (L) during an argument in last week's La Liga action.

AFP
Barcelona

Key Barcelona defender Samuel Umtiti will fly out to Doha for specialised treatment on a recurring left knee injury, the Spanish champions said yesterday.

Umtiti is said to be keen to avoid going under the knife and is seeking a softer solution.

Considered one of the best centre-backs in the world, the left-footed Frenchman has played just eight games for Barcelona this season because of the recurring pain in his knee.

The 2018 World Cup winner played in the 1-1 draw with Atletico Madrid at the weekend but that was his first game

in almost two months due to the pain which returned after the bruising game in Madrid.

"Samuel Umtiti will follow a plan of conservative treatment with the objective of curing the discomfort in his left knee," Barce reported on their website yesterday.

"The player will travel to Doha, Qatar where he will follow this therapeutic plan under the supervision of the club's medical services."

Catalan sports daily Sport said Umtiti "would not play again in 2018", claiming he would stay in Doha several weeks.

Another sports daily Mundo Deportivo said the player and club wished to avoid surgery in the search for a solution to the pain.