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Neymar injury concern as PSG draw with Bordeaux

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GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

Williamson and Watling boost NZ after Yasir shines

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SPOTLIGHT

Can Samba emulate Barshim by winning top IAAF award?

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Can Abderrahman Samba make it two-in-a-row for Qatar after Mutaz Barshim won the IAAF Male Athlete of the Year in 2017?

Samba, the 400m hurdling sensation, who finished the Diamond League season unbeaten, is up against recently-minted world record holders Kevin Mayer (decathlon) Armand Duplantis (pole vault, U-20) and Christian Coleman (60m indoors) besides Eliud Kipchoge (marathon).

The IAAF's prestigious awards gala will take place today in Monaco as the world governing body for the sport honours the year's best athletes whose achievements helped contribute to another unforgettable year for track and field.

Qatar's Samba, this year set the world's quickest time in 400m hurdles since 1992, beating the record of Edwin Moses. He also won the 400m hurdles and 4x400m relay gold at the Jakarta Asian Games.

Samba set the track on fire this season and holds the world lead in 400m hurdles being unbeaten in nine finals of the Diamond League. More than 80 of the world's finest track and field athletes will converge on the French Riviera to help celebrate the past year.

While the evening will reach its climax with the announcement of the male and female Athletes of the Year, the recipients of the IAAF Rising Star Awards, the Coaching Achievement Award, Women's Award and President's Award will also be revealed.

The ceremony will also name the winner of the second Athletics Photograph of the Year competition. The 25 shortlisted images will also form part of a photography exhibition which will be held alongside the IAAF Athletics Awards from December 1-5 at the Meridien Beach Plaza Hotel.

The IAAF Athletics Awards will be live streamed on the IAAF's YouTube Channel and Facebook page.

Last year, Qatar's legendary high jumper Mutaz Essa Barshim and Nafissatou Thiam of Belgium were named as the male and female IAAF World Athletes of the Year.

Track and field's top awards to be announced in Monaco today

File photo of Samba celebrating after winning the Intercontinental Cup in Ostrava earlier this year.



BOTTOMLINE

Reds boss Klopp charged for wild celebration

AFP
London

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp was charged by the Football Association yesterday after he raced onto the pitch to celebrate his side's late winner against Everton in the Merseyside derby.

The German was overjoyed by Divock Origi's 96th-minute goal courtesy of a horrendous misjudgement from Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford and raced over to Reds goalkeeper Alisson Becker.

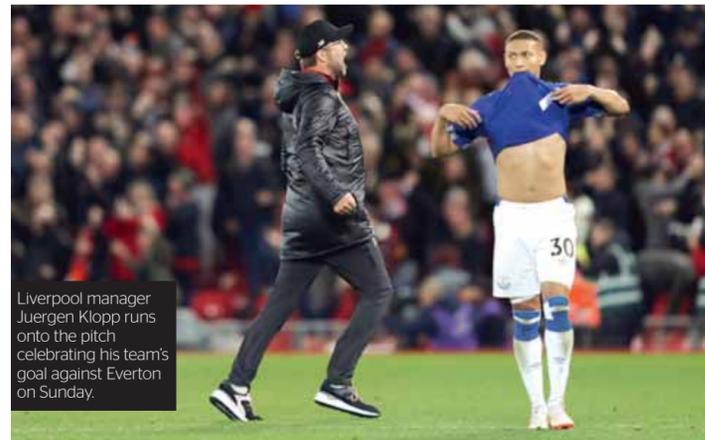
He apologised for his actions after the 1-0 win at Anfield but the FA announced he had been charged with misconduct.

Klopp has until 1800 GMT on Thursday to respond to the charge.

"Immediately after the game I apologised to (Everton manager) Marco Silva when we spoke to each other," Klopp said following the match. "I told him how much I respect his work."

"What can I say about it? I didn't want to run. It was not in my plan. I didn't want to run to Ali (goalkeeper Alisson), I couldn't stop obviously. Not cool, but it happened."

Silva said he did not hear an apology from the Liverpool boss, and added: "To be honest, I didn't see so I don't know what he did and how he did it." The last-gasp win took unbeaten Liverpool to 36 points - just two behind leaders Manchester City.



Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp runs onto the pitch celebrating his team's goal against Everton on Sunday.

Liverpool hero Origi said his added-time winner was one of the most important he has scored for the club.

The Belgium international, making his first appearance at Anfield since May 2017 after spending last season on loan at Wolfsburg, capitalised on Pickford's error to nod home from close range - his 22nd goal in 79 matches for the club. "It was a crucial goal, one of the

most crucial I have scored for Liverpool so it was special," said the 23-year-old. "You could see the emotion of the fans and the coach and the players so we celebrated all together."

Prior to his 84th-minute entrance on Sunday, Origi had played just 11 minutes for Liverpool this season in one substitute appearance during the 2-0 Champions League defeat in Serbia against Red Star Belgrade.

Bassem excels in Paris

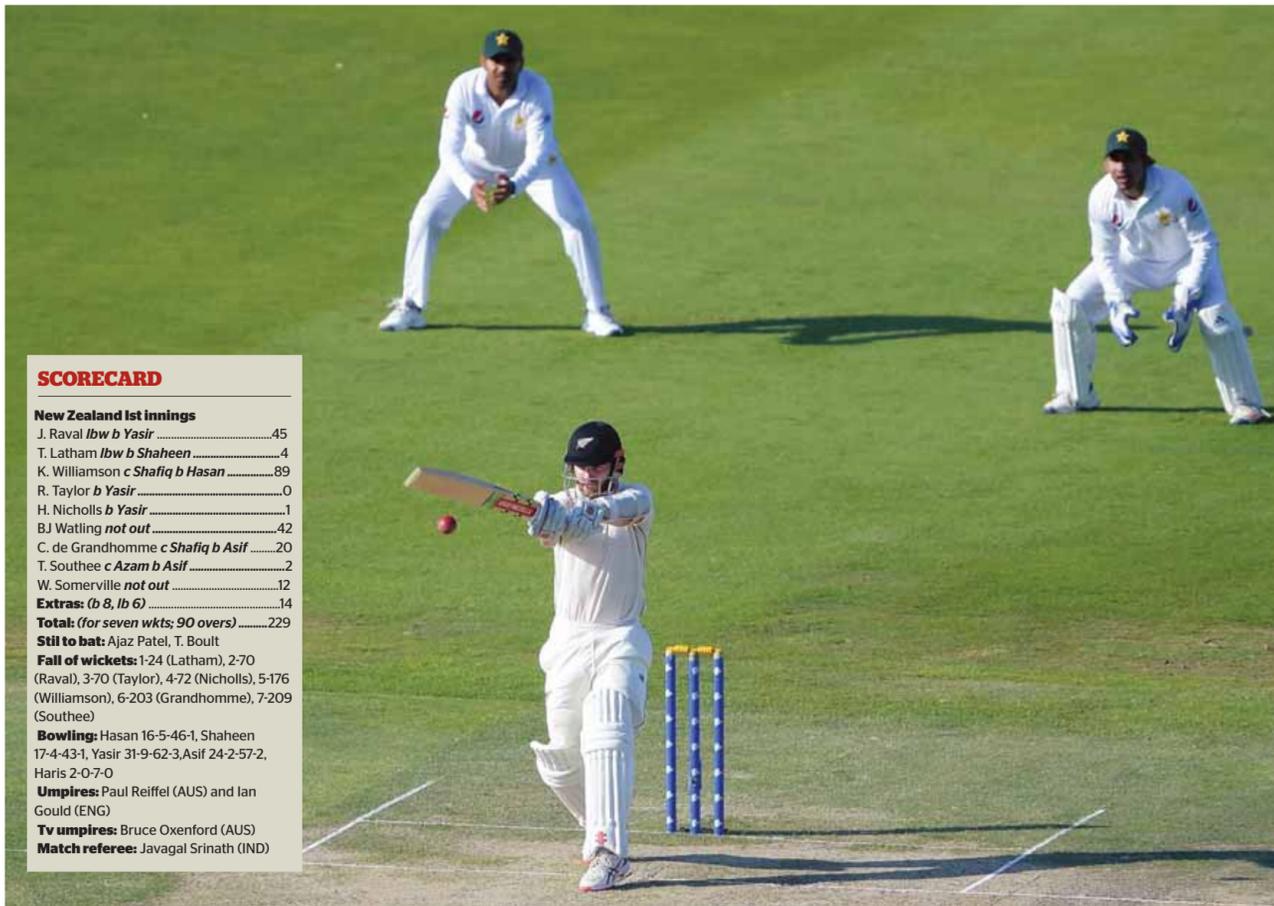


Qatar's ace rider Bassem Mohamed finished second in the Land Rover Grand Prix at the Paris Masters on Sunday. Bassem astride Gunder put on a splendid show to finish behind winner Britain's Tony Cadet, who clinched the title with Toledo de Mescam. Frenchman Olivier Guillon was third with Vitot du Chateau.

ABU DHABI TEST

Williamson and Watling boost NZ after Yasir shines

Yasir is aiming to become the fastest man to reach 200 Test wickets



SCORECARD

New Zealand 1st innings

J. Raval lbw b Yasir	45
T. Latham lbw b Shaheen	4
K. Williamson c Shafiq b Hasan	89
R. Taylor b Yasir	0
H. Nicholls b Yasir	1
BJ Watling not out	42
C. de Grandhomme c Shafiq b Asif	20
T. Southee c Azam b Asif	2
W. Somerville not out	12
Extras: (b 8, lb 6)	14
Total: (for seven wkts; 90 overs)	229
Still to bat: Ajaz Patel, T. Boult	
Fall of wickets: 1-24 (Latham), 2-70 (Raval), 3-70 (Taylor), 4-72 (Nicholls), 5-176 (Williamson), 6-203 (Grandhomme), 7-209 (Southee)	
Bowling: Hasan 16-5-46-1, Shaheen 17-4-43-1, Yasir 31-9-62-3, Asif 24-2-57-2, Harris 2-0-7-0	
Umpires: Paul Reffel (AUS) and Ian Gould (ENG)	
Tv umpires: Bruce Oxenford (AUS)	
Match referee: Javagal Srinath (IND)	

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson (C) plays a shot during the first day of the third and final Test match against Pakistan at the Sheikh Zayed International Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

AFP
Abu Dhabi

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson hit a fighting half century while BJ Watling batted with patience to delay leg-spinner Yasir Shah's bid to become the fastest to 200 wickets on the first day of the third and final Test in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

Williamson missed out on a 19th Test century but Watling was unbeaten on 42 as New Zealand closed on 229-7, a measured recovery after being reduced to 72-4 by a triple strike from Yasir in the first session.

Yasir began his 33rd Test needing five wickets to become the fastest man to reach the mile-

stone of 200 Test wickets.

The record is currently 36 Tests, set 82 years ago by Australian legspinner Clarrie Grimmett.

Yasir managed 3-62 but was then thwarted by the fifth wicket stand of 104 in 249 balls between Williamson and Watling.

He failed to take any more wickets in the last two sessions and still needs another two wickets to hit the 200-mark and claim the record.

Williamson struck seven boundaries but these were the bright points in a day when defence came first.

The normally robust and aggressive Kiwi captain curbed his attacking instinct as he attempted to carve out a first innings that might give his side some leverage

in the match.

The scoring rarely got above two an over.

Watling also dug in and the pair batted right through the middle session.

Williamson passed 50 in a Test for the 46th time but he was not able to convert his innings into another hundred.

Having reached 89 off 176 balls, he mistimed a clip off Hasan Ali shortly after tea and found a gleeful Asad Shafiq pouncing the catch at short midwicket.

Off-spinner Bilal Asif took over from Yasir, claiming Colin de Grandhomme for 20 and Tim Southee for two to finish with 2-57.

But Watling kept one end intact through his patient near-four hour batting, hitting only

one boundary in his 180-ball display of self-denial.

With both teams needing a win to seal a series which is currently tied at 1-1, Yasir was the key and the leg-spinner induced a mini-collapse in the morning as the Kiwis slipped from 70-1 to 73-4 at lunch.

Yasir trapped opener Jeet Raval leg before with a faster one for 45. Raval reviewed but ball-tracking showed it would have hit leg stump.

With his next ball, Yasir clean-bowled Ross Taylor as the batsman went back but completely missed the ball.

Henry Nicholls saved the hat-trick but shortly after he attempted to sweep but was bowled around his legs.

Yasir, whose 14 wickets helped

Pakistan level the series in Dubai, has 25 wickets in the series so far.

It was teenage left-arm pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi, making his Test debut as a replacement for injured medium pacer Mohamed Abbas, who gave Pakistan their initial breakthrough and claim his first Test victim.

The 18-year-old nipped one back sharply to rap opener Tom Latham on the pads.

Pakistan reviewed the on-field not out decision and were rewarded when ball-tracking showed the ball would have cannoned into the stumps.

New Zealand, who won the first Test by four runs in Abu Dhabi, brought in fast bowler Tim Southee and off-spinner Will Somerville in place of Neil Wagner and Ish Sodhi.

FOCUS

India's pace hype faces stern test in Australia series

Reuters
New Delhi

Having spent frustrating decades envying Pakistan's endless supply of fast bowlers across the border, India's excitement around their current pace attack is palpable but they would do well to temper their sunny optimism in Australia.

For a nation that traditionally built their bowling attack around crafty spinners who operated as if their life depended on it, India have finally acquired a versatile pace attack, which helped them claim 20 wickets in all but two Tests this year.

India captain Virat Kohli pleasantly finds himself spoilt for pace choice, a luxury none of his predecessors in the job had, and is naturally upbeat about winning the four-Test series Down Under, something the previous Indian teams could not manage in 11 previous attempts.

In Mohamed Shami, the tourists have got a quick who can move the ball both new and old. It was hardly a surprise that the Indian board limited his workload to 15-overs-per-innings in the domestic Ranji Trophy prior to the series in Australia.

Among others, Bhuvneshwar Kumar's prodigious swing, Umesh Yadav's consistent pace and Ishant Sharma's extra bounce make them real assets.

Cherry on top is Jasprit Bumrah, whose sling-arm action and awkward release point along with his ability to bowl yorkers almost at will adds an X-factor to the unit.

When coach Ravi Shastri was asked in August if this was the best Indian attack ever, the former Test player gushed, "By a mile, by a mile. No (other India) team comes even close."

South Africa captain Faf du Plessis concurred, having had a first-hand experience against them earlier this year when his team prevailed 2-1 in an intense home series.

"... for the first time, they've got three or four seamers in their squad that can bowl 140(kph)-plus and are very good bowlers," du Plessis told www.cricbuzz.com.

com.au recently.

"Obviously when you come to conditions like South Africa, Australia, England, you need pace bowlers and in the past they might have had one or two, but now they've got three or four."

"And when they travelled in South Africa (earlier this year), we felt like that was the best pace (attack) that they've had."

Considering they will be operating against an Australian team shorn of two of their best batsmen — the banned duo of Steve Smith and David Warner — India have reasons to be optimistic but the challenges are substantial.

For starters, it is going to be a different ball game, quite literally. Unlike the SG or Dukes balls they usually wreak havoc with, the old Kookaburra in Australia does not really swing or seam, which could substantially defang the Indian quicks, especially Kumar, who is unlikely to be fielded for the series opener in Adelaide from Thursday.

The lack of sideways movement from the firm surfaces will also mitigate the threat Shami or Yadav would otherwise pose bowling elsewhere, while the heat will challenge them to maintain their pace throughout the day.

Sharma will be looking forward to the extra bounce as he chases redemption in arguably the cruelest place for a touring bowler where each wicket has cost the touring bowlers 47 runs since 2000.

In his 10 Tests Down Under, the gangly quick has managed only 20 wickets with an embarrassing 62-plus average — worst by a full-time bowler who has sent down a minimum of 2000 balls in Australia.

The team could still benefit from the experience of the 30-year-old, believes former India pace spearhead Zaheer Khan.

"Ishant leading the attack on his fourth tour (of Australia) now, that's heaps of experience which is very important," Khan told www.cricbuzz.com.

"You need not look at the numbers all the time... the experience of playing in Australia is going to play a huge role."



Spoilt for choice: Virat Kohli

SPOTLIGHT

Gayle awarded \$220k in damages

Reuters
Sydney

West Indies batsman Chris Gayle was awarded A\$300,000 (\$220,770) in damages by an Australian court yesterday, more than a year after he won a defamation case against Fairfax Media over an alleged incident during the 2015 World Cup.

New South Wales Supreme Court Justice Lucy McCallum made the award for articles published in January 2016 that alleged the 103-Test cricketer had exposed himself to a masseuse during the tournament.

In October 2017, a jury found Fairfax had failed to establish the truth of the reports. It also found Fairfax had failed to establish that the allegation Gayle had propositioned the masseuse was "substantially true".

Justice McCallum said in her decision that the defamation "went to the heart of Mr Gayle's professional life as a respected batsman" and "had particular resonance in cricketing circles".

The jury also found that Fairfax was motivated by malice in publishing the stories, which could have left the company open to punitive damages.

Justice McCallum said she decided against aggravated damages because Gayle had not given evidence about whether the harm he suffered was increased by the malice. Fairfax Media said the publisher intended to appeal because of concerns over the way the trial was conducted.

"The jury was misled in a way that prejudiced Fairfax, and Fairfax did not get a fair trial," a spokesman said in a statement. "The damages award merely confirms the appalling burden of defamation laws in this country."

BOTTOMLINE

Bangladesh thumping of West Indies bittersweet for Walsh

AFP
Dhaka

Former West Indies bowling great Courtney Walsh has admitted to mixed emotions as his countrymen were routed by Bangladesh — the side he now helps coach, who earned a rare Test series win.

Bangladesh swept the series 2-0, with the second Test wrapping up Sunday inside three days as the Tigers recorded their first-ever victory by an innings margin.

The Caribbean visitors made just 111 runs in their first innings — the lowest Test score ever recorded against their hosts — to become the first side Bangladesh has ever asked to follow-on.

Walsh, a Jamaican cricketer



giant who took 519 Test wickets for the West Indies, today acts as fast-bowling coach for Bangladesh, and said the thumping was bittersweet.

"I might say that I am disappointed with probably how things have unfolded, but I am very happy to be involved with Bangladesh," Walsh told reporters in Dhaka.

"We are in a winning situation, so my pride is intact. As a West Indian, you are going to be disappointed in the performance."

Walsh's part in the second Test win was somewhat diminished as Bangladesh did not field a single fast bowler — an unprecedented move for the home side.

Their lone fast bowler in the first Test, Mustafizur Rahman, bowled just four overs in that match, leaving the spinners to

dominate.

Shakib Al Hasan, Mehidy Hasan, Taijul Islam and Nayeem Hasan accounted for all 40 wickets, a record for a Test series in Bangladesh.

Despite the spinners' dominance, Walsh insisted Bangladesh's fast bowlers had more to give.

"Tactically, we wanted to play more spinners to win a Test and the series. It was achieved," he said.

"Hopefully when we go to New Zealand, the seamers might get a better opportunity. We might get different types of wicket, and they should want to grab those opportunities as well." Bangladesh, who will also play three one-day internationals and three Twenty20 internationals against West Indies, will visit New Zealand in February.

HOCKEY WORLD CUP

Olympic champions Argentina crush NZ

'When you have a goalkeeper who makes a save from a penalty stroke you can only congratulate him. We are pleased with the draw in the end but we want to keep getting better and better'



Argentina's Agustin Mazzilli (centre) and New Zealand players vying for the ball during their group stage match at the 2018 Hockey World Cup in Bhubaneswar yesterday. (AFP)

FIH
Bhubaneswar

Day Six of the Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup Bhubaneswar 2018 featured the second round of matches in Pool A, with Argentina claiming their second successive Pool A victory to put themselves within touching distance of the quarter-finals yesterday.

Argentina's 3-0 victory over New Zealand sees them move onto six points at the top of the pool, three points ahead of second placed New Zealand with one round of matches to play. Spain and France - who drew in the day's earlier match - ended the day in third and fourth position respectively.

Spain and France started the day needing to recover from opening day defeats - Spain lost to Argentina while France fell to New Zealand - and get some crucially important points on the board.

France struck early in the contest when Victor Charlet's perfect backhand pass was guided home from close range by Timo-

the Clement, who changed the trajectory of the ball to give Spain shot-stopper Quico Cortes little hope of saving.

The Red Sticks dominated the second quarter, setting up camp in the opposition half but unable to get the goal that their endeavour deserved thanks to some excellent saves from France goalkeeper Arthur Thieffry.

While a penalty corner drag-flick from France captain Victor Charlet forced a fine save from Cortes in the third quarter, it was the Spaniards who remained on top and finally got their equaliser early in the fourth period. Alvaro Iglesias was the scorer, completing a slick passing move that cut through the France defence and allowed Spain's number nine the easiest of finishes.

Although it proved to be the final goal of game, France missed a gilt-edged opportunity to claim all three points when a penalty stroke from Hugo Geneset was brilliantly saved by a diving Cortes, cementing his position as the Odisha Player of the Match in the process.

"Quico was the best player of the game", said Spain's Marc Salles - who made his 200th senior international appearance in the match

- after the game.

"When you have a goalkeeper who makes a save from a penalty stroke you can only congratulate him. We are pleased with the draw in the end but we want to keep getting better and better in this tournament."

In celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD), before the start of the match the players of Spain and France were introduced to Guest of Honour Md Jafar Iqbal, a member of the India's World Cup winning blind cricket team.

Two teams that claimed victories in their first matches went head to head in the second game of the day, with New Zealand determined to upset the FIH Hero World Rankings by attempting to get the better of reigning Olympic champions Argentina.

Despite a difference of seven places in the rankings, New Zealand held their own for much of the opening quarter, limiting Los Leones to half chances.

Argentina eventually made the breakthrough midway through the second quarter thanks to a terrific backhand strike from Agustin Mazzilli, who picked out the top left corner of the Black

Sticks net for his third goal of the competition. Argentina made it 2-0 in the third when New Zealand captain Blair Tarrant was robbed of possession in his on circle by Lucas Vila, who made no mistake with a blistering finish past the left hand of Black Sticks goalkeeper Richard Joyce. The match scoring was completed by Lucas Martinez five minutes from the end, who dived in to make it 3-0 from close range after Argentina's initial penalty corner attempt had been blocked.

"It was a great game for us", said Argentina's Lucas Vila, who was named Odisha Player of the Match, at the end of the game.

"I think our defence was really strong and in attack we took our chances and scores some good goals. Its only two games so there is a long way to go, but I think we are in a good way and now we have a few days to make some little changes."

The action continues today with two crucial matches in Pool B. Australia will be looking to consolidate their position at the top of the table when face England at 1700 before Ireland take on China at 1900.

The Kookaburras were victorious over Ireland in their first Pool B match, with China holding England to a draw. The day's results are certain to be significant in the potential finishing positions in this group.

Australia coach Colin Batch felt that his team would be given a stern test by England, stating: "We will have to overcome a motivated England team who conceded a late goal to draw their match against China.

While they will be disappointed with the outcome, statistically they did very well in the match so I don't see them making many changes to their style of play.

"We were pleased to win our first match; however, we need to improve from our performance against Ireland", continued Batch, who was a member of the Australia squad that won the 1986 FIH Men's World Cup in London, England.

"The Irish team was able to deny our scoring and we need to get more outcomes from our attacking circle entries. We missed two injections on our penalty corners and while that is rare, we need to make sure we are better in that area."

BOXING

Fury says Wilder will try to avoid rematch 'at all costs'

AFP
London

Tyson Fury said yesterday WBC heavyweight champion Deontay Wilder will try to avoid a rematch with him "at all costs" after their epic draw in Los Angeles.

Wilder retained his belt on Saturday after a thrilling 12-round battle ended in a split decision draw at the Staples Center.

The result means the American is still in a position to achieve his dream of unifying the heavyweight division against Fury's fellow Briton Anthony Joshua, who holds the WBA, IBF and WBO versions of the title.

After the bout, Wilder said he would prefer to target Joshua's titles in a bid to unify the division but would be satisfied with either a rematch against Fury or a chance to take on Joshua. But Fury said that Wilder could try to avoid him.

"I've got a funny feeling he's going to get his running shoes

out and stay away from me at all costs," he told Britain's ITV network.

"I'm only getting better, and better and better. I can beat them all but they need to fight me. We need to give Britain the biggest fight in British boxing history and that's me and Joshua.

"Let's make it happen. The country wants it, I want it, everybody wants it. The only people who don't seem to want it is their team," he added.

Wilder's trainer Jay Deas told BBC radio he would want Wilder to take on Fury again before a potential fight with Joshua.

"If it's something that people would like to see again we would absolutely love to do it. Both guys put on a tremendous fight," Deas said.

"If it was up to me - and only me - I would like to do the Fury fight first because I think there is unfinished business.

"If the money makes sense in the UK I would love to do it there. Deontay has never had a problem with travelling. That's not the issue at all."

Williams sign Canadian Latifi as F1 reserve

Canadian Nicholas Latifi will be a reserve driver for Williams next season, the Formula One team announced yesterday. The 23-year-old was previously test and reserve driver for Force India, who now have Canadian owners and have been renamed Racing Point F1.

Williams, former champions who finished last in the championship that ended in November, have Britain's 2018 Formula Two champion George Russell and Poland's Robert Kubica as their race drivers for 2019. British-based Williams said Latifi, whose father Michael

this year bought a stake of around 10 percent in the McLaren Group, would help them at race weekends and in the factory.

He will drive in six Friday first free practice (FP1) sessions as well as test days before and during the season.

"It's a fantastic opportunity to continue my F1 development, and to build my on-track experience with more FP1 sessions and the rookie and Pirelli tests," said Latifi in a statement.

"As well as this, a big part of my role will be simulator driving and helping to support the development of the new car."

TENNIS

Halep, Osaka to play in Sydney International

AFP
Sydney

World number one Simona Halep and US Open champion Naomi Osaka will headline a strong field in the women's draw of the Sydney International, organisers said yesterday.

Eight of the world's top 10 have signed on for the January 6-12 event as they use it to warm up for the Australian Open Grand Slam the following week. Also playing will be defending champion and Wimbledon winner Angelique Kerber, Sloane Stephens, Petra Kvitova, Karolina Pliskova, Kiki Bertens, and Daria Kasatkina.

The only two members of the top 10 not taking part are Caro-

line Wozniacki and Elina Svitolina. The men's side is weaker with Britain's 14th-ranked Kyle Edmund the top seed, along with the likes of Gilles Simon, Alex de Minaur, Lucas Pouille and Jo-Wilfried Tsonga.

Talented American Frances Tiafoe will join fellow breakthrough sensations Stefanos Tsitsipas and Edmund.

Tiafoe has established himself as one of the most exciting rising stars in men's tennis in 2018, becoming the youngest American to win an ATP World Tour title (since Andy Roddick in 2002) when he claimed the ATP 250 title at the Delray Beach Open in February. "I'm delighted that so many of the world's most talented players have chosen to come to Sydney in January," said tournament director Lawrence Robertson.

GOLF

Rahm wins Hero World Challenge

AFP
Nassau, Bahamas

Jon Rahm says a putting tip last August from tournament host Tiger Woods helped the Spaniard to storm his way to a four-shot success at the Hero World Challenge on Sunday.

Rahm, 24, was never challenged over the final round, shooting a bogey-free 65 for a 20-under par total on the Albany course.

The win is Rahm's third success this season and a seventh victory in his short two-year pro career and in the process sees Rahm move to a career high No. 6 on the world rankings.

Rahm had shared the lead on both day two and day three and capped his closing round with three birdies in four holes from the sixth. Last September, Rahm was drawn in the Ryder Cup

Sunday singles against boyhood idol Woods and delivered Europe their much-needed first point with two and one triumph.

Now Rahm has his name on Woods' Hero World Challenge trophy. "That Sunday with Tiger is one of the most emotional, most important moments in my golf career," said Rahm.

"I started crying when I was shaking his hand because that meant so much to me to play against Tiger Woods.

"A couple of months later to win his event - his Foundation's event along with Hero, this is really special."

And it was the putting tip on the practice green at East Lake that has now sees Rahm become the first Spanish winner of the Hero World Challenge.

"When we were at East Lake Tiger was putting next to me. I just can't putt on Bermuda as I had grown up in Spain on poa annua," said Rahm.

"Tiger kind of laughed and said 'it's all about feel out there'. In presenting me the trophy he said, 'Hey, that's a pretty good performance from someone who can't putt on Bermuda greens.'"

American Tony Finau holed a dramatic 10-footer for birdie at the last in a score of 69 for second place at 16-under and in the process denying Justin Rose from returning to World No. 1.

Rose, who eagled 15 in a last round 65, had been sharing second place in 15-under par and the assurance of again becoming World No. 1 only for Finau to pull the rug out from under the Englishman.

"It's not a huge goal for me to be No. 1, but when you have these opportunities you want to take them," said Rose.

And Woods rounded-off his full-season return to competition with a tired-looking 73 to

finish 17th in the 18-player field.

FULL YEAR FOR WOODS
"The entire year has been amazing and I've just been so blessed to have the opportunity," said Woods.

"To come from where I came from last year at this point to have the ability to actually play and compete again in the game and do it consistently is quite amazing."

"The desire hasn't changed. It's just the body is sometimes unwilling to respond to what the mind wants," the 14-times major champion told *Golf Channel*.

"That's just part of the injuries I've had and the ageing process and trying to deal with that and compete." Woods was then headed to his private jet to Los Angeles to board a Qantas flight to Melbourne and arriving today for a three-day Presidents Cup inspection and promotion of the event being staged later next

year on the famed Royal Melbourne course. Woods, as the USA Team captain, is due to host a press conference on course Wednesday in Melbourne.

- FINAL SCORES**
268-Jon Rahm (ESP) 71-63-69-65
272-Tony Finau 72-64-67-69
273-Justin Rose (ENG) 70-70-68-65
274-Henrik Stenson (SWE) 68-66-69-71
275-Patrick Cantlay 65-70-76-64,
Rickie Fowler 72-67-67-69
276-Dustin Johnson 68-67-72-69
277-Alex Noren (SWE) 69-69-70-69,
Xander Schauffele 73-68-66-70,
Gary Woodland 72-66-67-72
280-Bryson DeChambeau 70-71-71-68,
Justin Thomas 70-70-70-70,
Bubba Watson 69-73-69-69
282-Keegan Bradley 71-69-72-70
283-Jason Day (AUS) 71-72-70-70
287-Tiger Woods 73-69-72-73
288-Hideki Matsuyama (JAP) 74-68-71-75.



Jon Rahm of Spain poses with the trophy after winning the Hero World Challenge at Albany, Bahamas. (Getty Images/AFP)

NBA

Mavs topple Clippers, Lakers ease past Suns

'I thought it was one of the best competitive things I've seen in a long time'



Dallas Mavericks forward Harrison Barnes (No 40) and LA Clippers guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander fight for the loose ball during the second quarter at the American Airlines Center. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

AFP
Los Angeles

The short-handed Dallas Mavericks denied the Los Angeles Clippers a fifth straight NBA victory Sunday, dropping the Clippers from first place in the Western Conference with a 114-110 win.

Harrison Barnes scored 30 points to lead the Mavericks, who were without star rookie Luka Dončić.

But DeAndre Jordan, playing his first game against his former team, chipped in 16 points and 23 rebounds for Dallas, who notched a fourth win in their last five games even with Dončić sidelined by a sore hip.

The Clippers had taken the lead for just the second time in the contest on Lou Williams' three-pointer with 46.9 seconds remaining.

Barnes drove for a basket and missed but Mavs forward Dorian Finney-Smith tipped in the rebound to put Dallas back on top.

They led 112-110 when Dennis Smith

RESULTS

Miami	102-100	Utah
Philadelphia	103-95	Memphis
Dallas	114-110	Clippers
San Antonio	131-118	Portland
Charlotte	109-119	New Orleans
Lakers	120-96	Phoenix

blocked a shot by Tobias Harris and made two free throws to seal the win.

"I thought it was one of the best competitive things I've seen in a long time," Mavs coach Rick Carlisle said of Smith's effort. "He got switched and blocked the shot, got the rebound and made two free throws - winning plays."

It was a bruising contest. Smith lost a tooth when Patrick Beverley's elbow caught him in the mouth and the intensity ramped up from there.

Dallas forward Wesley Matthews was whistled for a technical foul and Beverley was ejected for throwing a ball at a fan as the Clippers fell to 15-7 and ceded first place in the West to Denver.

Back in Los Angeles, meanwhile, the

Lakers were coasting to a relaxed 120-96 victory over the struggling Phoenix Suns.

Kyle Kuzma led the Lakers with 23 points. Superstar LeBron James added 22 while sitting out the entire fourth quarter of the comfortable victory.

The Suns led by as many as 17 in a first quarter in which James characterized the Lakers' play as "horrible".

But Los Angeles had cut that deficit to 10 points by the end of the period and out-scored the Suns 40-15 in the second to seize control.

"I think we're just getting better every day," three-time NBA champion James said of the young Lakers team. "We know what's winning basketball for us - that's defending and sharing the ball."

DAVIS DOMINANT

Anthony Davis powered the New Orleans Pelicans to a 119-109 victory over the Hornets in Charlotte, delivering 36 points, 19 rebounds and eight assists.

Davis, who also came up with two steals and blocked two shots, set the tone early with 17 points in the first quarter.

"When he plays like that, he's unstop-

pable, and that trickles down to us," said Pelicans point guard Tim Frazier.

It was a much-needed road win for the Pelicans, who improved to 12-12.

DeMar DeRozan's big game helped the San Antonio Spurs bounce back from two embarrassing defeats with a 131-118 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers.

After losing their last two games by a combined 68 points, the Spurs responded with their highest point total in two weeks.

LaMarcus Aldridge added 29 points and Rudy Gay chipped in 18 as the Spurs stood a 37-point performance from Portland's Damian Lillard.

In Miami, Dwyane Wade drained two free throws with 3.2 seconds remaining to seal the Heat's 102-100 victory over the Utah Jazz.

The 76ers notched a fourth straight victory, 103-95 over the Memphis Grizzlies in Philadelphia.

JJ Redick led the 76ers with 24 points. Jimmy Butler delivered another dominant fourth-quarter performance, scoring 13 of his 21 points in the final period to keep the Grizzlies at bay.

SPOTLIGHT

Markkanen's return begins period of heightened scrutiny for Bulls and Hoiberg

By K.C. Johnson
Chicago Tribune

Lauri Markkanen is back. Now what?

There will be offensive sets with the versatile forward in the post. Plays will be designed to free him for 3-pointers. He will bring the ball up to initiate offense at times and be involved in plenty of screen-and-roll situations with Zach LaVine at others.

These all are good things for the Bulls.

But Markkanen's return after missing the first 23 games with a right elbow injury also will feature a period of adjustment and changing roles, not to mention heightened expectations and increased scrutiny from management on coach Fred Hoiberg and his staff. That scrutiny will be further intensified when Kris Dunn and Bobby Portis return, which, barring a setback, will happen in the next few weeks.

Hoiberg's future has been an open topic since the eve of training camp when management fielded questions on how the coach would be judged in order to make it to the final season of his five-year deal. The widespread injuries that have contributed to a six-game losing streak - and 10 losses in 11 games - have challenged management to hold true to its vow not to judge Hoiberg by the won-lost record.

But with the team headed to full strength save for Denzel Valentine and his season-ending left ankle surgery, management will be watching closely for more organized and efficient offense and better player development. If those don't manifest themselves as the team gets whole, an in-season coaching change wouldn't be a surprise.

Hoiberg and the players are optimistic for progress. But they also know work remains.

"We have some times where it doesn't look right. And we have times where we look really good," LaVine said.

"We'll get some dudes back and really see what we're

about."

Before Markkanen's injury in late September, Hoiberg talked excitedly about utilizing him and LaVine as two offensive talents in screen-and-roll situations. But Hoiberg also quickly shelved the experiment of playing Jabari Parker at small forward, a look the coach resuscitated in Markkanen's first game back.

"I'm excited to get a bigger sample size with all the line-ups and see which ones work the best," Hoiberg said. "We had the three of them out there together for a short period of time. I think (Parker) and Lauri can play very well together. And I think Lauri can play very well with Wendell. That's the future of this franchise, those two guys on your frontline."

A case in point for the adjustment period: After scoring a career-high 28 points on Friday, Carter had just six shots and scored eight points on Saturday.

Still, Markkanen, who likely will move into the starting lineup as early as Tuesday against the Pacers, sounded upbeat about what's to come.

"It's going to be awesome," he said. "We just need to get some run-in together. All I played was like two practices in training camp. I think me and Wendell complement each other really well. Him being the rim protector that he is, we can switch on defense. Offensively, he can pretty much do everything."

Hoiberg doubled down on his commitment to playing Parker some at small forward. This will drop Justin Holiday's minutes.

"He's one of the more talented players on this roster," Hoiberg said of Parker. "We have to get some lineups practicing and used to each other."

Parker has posted four double-doubles in his last seven games and scored at least 20 points in five of his last seven. He didn't like being moved to the bench during preseason, a role he'll have to embrace unless Hoiberg opts to start Parker over Holiday at small forward.



Chicago Bulls forward Lauri Markkanen passes around Milwaukee Bucks forward John Henson in the first half on January 28, 2018 at the United Center in Chicago. PICTURE: Chicago Tribune/TNS

NHL

Ducks rally to stun Capitals

Reuters
Washington

Pontus Aberg scored the tiebreaker with 5:05 remaining and finished with two goals and one assist as the Anaheim Ducks rallied from a four-goal second period deficit and stunned the host Washington Capitals 6-5 on Sunday afternoon.

Aberg scored his second goal of the game after a pass from Ryan Getzlaf (one goal, two assists). With Washington goalie Braden Holtby pulled away from the net, Aberg scored easily from the left side and completed the Ducks' comeback from a 5-1 deficit as they scored the final five goals.

The Ducks scored twice in the second period and added three more in the third and ended Washington's seven-game winning streak.

For the Ducks, Ryan Miller came on for starting goalie John Gibson after he gave up three goals in the first 13:19 and held Washington to two, earning the win.

Miller finished with 19 saves in the win.

Nicklas Backstrom gave the Capitals a 1-0 lead when he scored in the opening minute. Alex Ovechkin came in with Backstrom on a two-on-one rush and fed his line-mate, who easily put it away.

Chandler Stephenson scored at 6:08 when his centering pass from the right side deflected off an Anaheim player's skate and past Gibson. Getzlaf cut the lead to 2-1 with his

RESULTS

Anaheim	6-5	Washington
Winnipeg	4-3	Rangers
Calgary	3-2	Chicago
San Jose	3-1	Montreal
Colorado	2-0	Detroit
Los Angeles	2-0	Carolina

goal for the Ducks at 9:24 before Washington answered once more.

John Carlson blasted a shot from near the blue line that Tom Wilson got his stick on to deflect past Gibson. That goal came at 13:19, made it 3-1, and ended Gibson's day.

The Capitals stretched the lead to 4-1 on Evgeny Kuznetsov's dazzling goal in the second period. He was sprung by a quick pass from Brett Connolly near center ice, came in alone, made a quick fake that moved Miller and actually tucked the puck into the corner of the net while a stride or two past it at 4:59.

Nic Dowd added a Washington goal later in the period before Andrew Cogliano and Rickard Rakell started Anaheim's comeback with goals 55 seconds apart, and it was 5-3 after two periods.

The Ducks then got power-play goals from Aberg and Hampus Lindholm less than two minutes apart midway through the third period, tying the game with 10:59 remaining. Both came as a result of boarding penalties to Dmitry Orlov of the Capitals. Aberg got the game-winner later on.

AVALANCHE'S VARLAMOV SHUTS OUT RED WINGS

Semyon Varlamov had 24 saves for his first shutout of the season and Nathan MacKinnon had a goal and an assist as the Colorado Avalanche beat the host Detroit Red Wings 2-0 on Sunday night.

Gabe Landeskog also had a goal and an assist, and Mikko Rantanen, the leading scorer in the NHL, had assists on both goals for the Avalanche, who have gone 9-0-2 since losing five in a row.

Colorado's top line accounted for all the points, and the shutout is the first this season for the team.

MacKinnon, who led the league in scoring in November and was named the NHL's second star for the month, kept up his strong play with his 19th goal of the season. He struck six seconds after Jonathan Ericsson drew a holding minor.

MacKinnon won the faceoff back to Landeskog, who fed Rantanen low. Rantanen quickly sent a pass to MacKinnon in the slot, and his one-timer beat former teammate Jonathan Bernier at 4:54 of the second period.

Tyson Jost had a chance to give Colorado a two-goal lead when he had a breakaway later in the second period, but the puck slid off his stick as he tried to backhand it past Bernier.

Bernier, who was Varlamov's backup last season, finished with 27 saves.

The game featured two teams that compromised one of the most heated rivalries from 1996-2002.



Pontus Aberg (left) of the Anaheim Ducks celebrates his game-winning goal with teammate Kiefer Sherwood against the Washington Capitals during the third period in Washington. (Getty Images/AFP)

NFL

Rams grab NFC West division crown, Pats roll and Packers fade

'That's the first step. We're happy, but we have to keep rolling'



Los Angeles Rams running back Todd Gurley runs for a touchdown during the second-half against the Detroit Lions at Ford Field. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

AFP
Los Angeles

The Los Angeles Rams became the first team to move into the NFL playoffs on Sunday as the Green Bay Packers fired coach Mike McCarthy in the wake of a shock loss to the Arizona Cardinals.

Week 13 brought another milestone day for superstar New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady, who matched Peyton Manning's all-time record for passing touchdowns with his 579th in a 24-10 victory over the Minnesota Vikings.

It was just one memorable mark on the day for five-time Super Bowl champion Brady, who also, finally, surpassed 1,000 rushing yards for his career in his 265th NFL game. The Rams, coming off a big week, got off to a slow start in Detroit.

Quarterback Jared Goff made just 17 of 33 passes for 207 yards and an eight-yard touchdown pass to Robert Woods late in the first half that broke a 3-3 tie.

It was running back Todd Gurley who put the Rams over the top, running for 132 yards and two touchdowns and also catching three passes for 33 yards.

Rams defender Aaron Donald helped clinch the win when he forced a fumble from Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford in the fourth quarter.

Linebacker Samson Ebukam recovered the ball at the Detroit 24-yard-line and Gurley raced 13 yards for a touchdown three plays later to put the Rams up 23-13.

The victory pushed the Rams to 11-1, moving them a step closer to home-field advantage in the NFC playoffs. They are one game ahead of New Orleans for the top seed in the conference after the Saints lost to the Dallas Cowboys in an upset on Thursday. It's the first time since 1979 that the Rams have won back-to-back division titles. "That's the first step," Donald said. "We're happy, but we have to keep rolling."

The Kansas City Chiefs continued their playoff push with a 40-33 victory over the Oakland Raiders. Patrick Mahomes threw four touchdown passes, joining Manning and Brady as the only quarterbacks to reach the 40 touchdown mark through 12 games in a season. The Chiefs didn't seem to miss star running back Kareem Hunt, who was released on Friday after celebrity news site TMZ released video of a February incident that showed him shoving and kicking a woman. Spencer Ware started

RESULTS

Denver	24-10	Cincinnati
Chicago	27-30	Giants
Carolina	17-24	Tampa Bay
Cleveland	13-29	Houston
Rams	30-16	Detroit
Buffalo	17-21	Miami
Indianapolis	0-6	Jacksonville
Baltimore	26-16	Atlanta
Arizona	20-17	Green Bay
Jets	22-26	Tennessee

in place of Hunt and scored on a fourth-and-goal play from the one yard line in the third quarter. "The mindset of this team is whenever you get your opportunity, you make the most of it," Mahomes said.

"I think every single game, someone else steps up. We kept our mind on that and just playing football, a game we love." Despite their 10th victory of the season, the Chiefs were unable to punch their playoff ticket thanks to victories for the Miami Dolphins and Houston Texans.

The Dolphins kept their AFC post-season hopes alive with a 21-17 victory

over the Buffalo Bills and the AFC South-leading Texans beat the Cleveland Browns 29-13 for their ninth straight victory.

The Los Angeles Chargers rallied from a 27-3 deficit to beat the Steelers 33-30 in Pittsburgh. Michael Badgley kicked the game-winning 29-yard field goal with no time remaining. He actually made good on his third try after the Steelers were twice whistled for off-side - as he missed a 39-yard attempt and had a 34-yard effort blocked. The Carolina Panthers' playoff hopes took a hit with a 24-17 loss to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Panthers quarterback Cam Newton threw four interceptions and veteran tight end Greg Olsen said after the game he would miss the rest of the season after reinjuring his right foot. The situation got bleaker in Green Bay, too, as the 3-9 Cardinals stunned the Packers, 20-17, at Lambeau Field.

Zane Gonzalez kicked a 44-yard field goal with 1:41 remaining that stood as the game-winner when Green Bay's Mason Crosby missed a 49-yarder as time expired. Hours later, the Packers announced that McCarthy, who guided the team to the Super Bowl crown in the 2010 season, had been fired in his 13th season with the club.

SPOTLIGHT

Brady ties Manning mark, hits 1,000-yard rushing record

AFP
New York

Superstar New England quarterback Tom Brady, the 1,000-yard rushing mark finally achieved, added to his passing plaudits as well on Sunday with a record-equalling 579th career touchdown pass.

Five-time Super Bowl winner Brady connected with Josh Gordon for a 24-yard TD late in the third quarter of a 24-10 victory over Minnesota to tie Peyton Manning for the most touchdown passes in NFL history, regular season and playoffs included.

It was Brady's 508th regular-season touchdown pass - tied for third on the career list with Brett Favre behind Manning's 539.

But that was just one of the milestones reached Sunday by Brady, who finally amassed 1,000 rushing yards for his career.

Never known for his scrambling abilities, Brady hit the plateau on a five-yard burst in the first quarter.

Brady, who has passed for more than 69,000 yards in his stellar career, needed 19 years and 265 games to reach the 1,000-yard rushing mark.

The most he ever ran for in a season was 110 yards in 2002,

and his history of kneel downs to run out the clock at the end of games has no doubt cost him chances to get to milestone sooner.

ESPN Stats & Information reckoned that heading into Sunday's game Brady had lost 160 rushing yards to kneel-downs since 2006.

Brady had spoken lightly-heardly of late of chasing the 1,000-yard rushing mark, but he downplayed the moment after the game.

"I don't want to make too much of a four- or five-yard gain. That wasn't really a difference in the game," he said. "I'm not going to save the ball."

"Obviously, I'm not a scrambler. Hopefully I can make a couple of plays running for it. I made a good third down (play) on that one."

The Patriots were having none of that modesty on their Twitter feed.

"HE DID IT" they crowed in post after Brady, under pressure in the pocket on a third-down with three yards to go play, shot through an opening to pick up a first down.

Their next post, however, noted that the previous high for games needed for a quarterback to reach 1,000 rushing yards was the 161 of former Giants great Y A Tittle - who in fact finished his career with just 999.



New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady reacts after a touchdown during the first quarter against the Minnesota Vikings at Gillette Stadium. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

MLB

Dark days are ahead for rebuilding Mariners

By Larry Stone
The Seattle Times

Two things about the impending trade of Robinson Cano and Edwin Diaz to the Mets, on top of all the other foundation-ripping moves the Mariners have made and the inevitable ones still to come:

1. Dark, desolate times are ahead, no way to sugarcoat it. The Mariners will be a lousy baseball team in 2019 and 2020. Then we'll take inventory and see how the rebuild is going, but you can probably add on a couple crummy years on top of that. That's if they're lucky.

2. This is nevertheless the right way for the Mariners to go, weighing all the circumstances at play.

Reconciling those two opinions will be difficult, maybe impossible, for Mariners fans, who have been beaten down by so many years of bitter disappointment and management malfeasance.

And it's important to note that it's the right way for the Mariners to go only because of a tidal wave of bad decisions they've

made over the years.

But that's where they are. And there's salvation in squarely facing reality.

This is a potential path out of the vast middle ground they have found themselves mired in. I've gone over this before, but they are light years behind the Astros in their own division, and the Red Sox/Yankees in the wild-card race. So for the foreseeable future, their best-case scenario was the second wild card.

On top of that, the 2018 Mariners were an 89-win team in name only. Their path to that total last year was so fluky, and so unsustainable, that I give Jerry Dipoto credit for not clinging to the wishful delusion that they were better than that. Anyone with any baseball acumen could see the Mariners were headed for a fall in 2019.

So now Dipoto has started the process, with the fervent hope that when it all gets rebuilt, they will be in a far better place than they would have been by muddling along, hoping for miracles.

They've traded their ace pitcher, James Paxton. They've traded their defensive-whiz catcher, Mike Zunino, and one of their shutdown relievers, Alex



Seattle Mariners manager Scott Servais

Colome. They're letting their best power hitter, designated hitter Nelson Cruz, move on with minimal or no effort to resign him. Same with outfielder Denard Span.

And now, once the deal is officially announced, they'll be without their unparalleled reliever, Edwin Diaz, and their superstar second baseman, Robinson Cano. After that, you can

pick names out of a hat to see who's next to go: Jean Segura? Mike Leake? Dee Gordon? Kyle Seager?

Dipoto is doing what he has always resisted: Tearing it down to the studs, to use his phrase. Or, if Dipoto decides to hang on to Mitch Haniger, their best and most marketable player remaining, tearing it down to the stud.

At this point, though, why

not go all the way? By the time the Mariners come out the other side, Haniger will be in his 30s and approaching free agency. Once they have dealt Paxton and Diaz, the Mariners in essence are making the statement that no one is off limits.

Will it work? It worked, to the hilt, for the Astros and Cubs, who got a World Series crown out of their tear-down. It's

working right now for the Braves and possibly the Phillies. The jury is still out on the multitude of other teams who are going the "tanking" route, to use the most pejorative description (one that will never, ever escape Dipoto's lips). The ideal scenario will be to accelerate the rebuild, i.e., minimize the misery, with the Brewers as the role model.

It all depends, of course, on the prospects that are suddenly flooding Seattle's way, and how well, and how quickly, they develop. One need only say the names "Jesus Montero" and "Justin Smoak" to understand the pitfalls that are lurking. But now, at least, the Mariners will have star-quality (maybe even superstar) talent in what had been a barren farm system. It would serve them well to obtain even more of it.

After that, it would help to get a little lucky. The Astros wouldn't have gotten where they did without a 5-foot-5 infielder they signed with little expectation out of a Venezuelan tryout camp, Jose Altuve.

He became the best player in the American League in 2017. The Cubs don't get where they did without an unnoticed trade

for Jake Arrieta, a washout with the Orioles who became a Cy Young Award winner. And it would behoove the Mariners, obviously, to draft much better than they have, particularly with their top 10 picks. The Mariners' draft failures, more than any single thing, are what got them into this predicament. Incongruously, they will be drafting 20th overall in 2019, uncommonly low for a team in tear-down mode. But that's those 89 wins at work. They should be back in the top 10 by 2020.

The bulk of the team the Mariners put out on the field this upcoming season will be of the makeshift variety. The real drama will be on the minor-league level as the next wave of talent starts down their path.

Whether those players get to the finish line with the full realization of their potential is anyone's guess. The baseball landscape - especially the Mariners' landscape - is littered with failed prospects.

There are no guarantees, in other words. The whole endeavor is fraught with danger. The playoff drought will push, or surpass, two decades. But it still beats the alternative.

LIGUE 1

Neymar injury concern after Bordeaux end PSG's flawless run

Brazilian striker substituted 57 minutes into the hugely entertaining 2-2 draw

AFP
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain are again sweating on Neymar's fitness after the superstar attacker left the field at Bordeaux on Sunday clutching his groin before Andreas Cornelius' late header ended the French champions' perfect start to the Ligue 1 season. Brazilian Neymar was substituted 57 minutes into the hugely entertaining 2-2 draw the Matmut Atlantique stadium, in which he had opened the scoring and had looked in great form before having to head to the dressing room with what looks to be an injury to the same adductor muscle that nearly stopped him from scoring the decisive goal in Wednesday's huge 2-1 win over Liverpool.

"I don't know at all (what his injury is). We have to be careful, he said it was not a problem to play tonight but the pitch was hard and I hope he will be in good shape after Strasbourg," said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel, referring to his side's must-win final Champions League group game at Red Star Belgrade in nine days' time.

The Ligue 1 leaders, who had won all 14 of their league matches going into Sunday's pulsating clash, had to wait until the last minute to see if Neymar and strike partner Kylian Mbappe would be ready for the win over the Reds, who now face an uphill battle for qualification to the Champions League last 16 thanks to Neymar's first-half winner last week.

The pair twice put PSG in front on Sunday, but Jimmy Briand and Cornelius ensured that Bordeaux became the first French team to stop the runaway leaders this season. However the result is unlikely to slow down PSG's march to the title, as they still stand 14 points ahead of nearest challengers Montpellier, who took advantage of Lyon drawing 2-2 at Lille to sneak into second with a 2-1 win at Thierry Henry's struggling Monaco on Saturday.

PSG's arch rivals Marseille failed to make the most of their fellow Champions League chasers dropping points



Bordeaux's Andreas Cornelius (left) celebrates after scoring against Paris Saint-Germain in the Ligue 1 in Bordeaux, southwestern France on Sunday night. (AFP)

after a goalless draw at Reims. Rudi Garcia's side stay fifth. Meanwhile mid-table Toulouse drew 2-2 with fellow relegation rivals Dijon and Strasbourg routed Rennes 4-1.

Neymar's opener for PSG came after a spell of concerted Bordeaux pressure and at the end of a superb exchange with countryman Dani Alves, who on his first start of the season flashed in a powerful cross that was crashed home

first-time by number 10.

His 11th league goal of the season took some time to be awarded however, as the VAR dithered over whether Mbappe was offside and interfering with the play as he flashed a leg at Neymar's shot. That goal looked to have broken Bordeaux, and Angel Di Maria, who had fluffed a golden chance laid on for him by Neymar earlier in the half, then struck the post in

first-half stoppage time as the home side rocked under pressure.

However the hosts fought back again after the break, and they got their first reward when Briand slotted home a fine cross from the lively Yann Karamoah. Neymar was substituted shortly afterwards and Bordeaux smelled blood, but Mbappe turned the match in PSG's favour, latching on to Julian Draxler's through ball before

crashing home what looked to be the winner and almost immediately asking to be substituted with an apparent muscle problem.

Tuchel didn't remove the 19-year-old however, and he was there to see Cornelius meet Maxime Poudjé's cross with such force that PSG keeper Alphonse Areola couldn't stop his header from crossing the line and ending PSG's 100% start.

Atletico's Costa to undergo foot operation in Brazil

Diego Costa will undergo an operation in Brazil this week to aid his recovery from a foot injury, Atletico Madrid said yesterday. The club would not estimate how long Costa might be out but said the striker had been feeling discomfort in his left foot for several weeks. "The player, who underwent surgery on the fifth metatarsal of his left foot twelve years ago, suffers from discomfort following a knock that occurred a few weeks ago." Costa played 90 minutes against Girona on Sunday and helped Atletico rescue a 1-1 draw as his run prompted Jonas Ramalho to score a late own-goal. The 30-year-old has struggled for form in recent months.

Sierra Leone disqualified from African Nations Cup

Sierra Leone have been disqualified from the 2019 African Cup of Nations qualifying competition, the Confederation of African Football (CAF) said. Football's world governing body FIFA had suspended the Sierra Leone Football Association (SLFA) in October due to "government interference". CAF's decision means Kenya and Ghana are assured of first and second place in Sierra Leone's Group F and have therefore booked their place in next year's finals. "Sierra Leone is disqualified from the qualifiers and all its matches are annulled," CAF said in a statement.

UEFA to use VAR from CL knockout rounds

Video Assistant Referees will be used in the Champions League from the knockout stages of this season's competition and in the Nations League finals in June, UEFA confirmed after a meeting of the Executive Committee. European football's governing body had previously stated its intention to introduce VAR only from the start of the 2019/2020 season. VAR is already used in a number of Europe's top leagues, including Spain's La Liga, Germany's Bundesliga and Serie A in Italy and was widely seen as a success at this summer's World Cup. The Europa League final and the under-21 European Championships in Italy in June will also use VAR.

Coach Lamouchi shown the door at Rennes

Rennes have effectively sacked their coach Sabri Lamouchi after he was suspended in the wake of poor recent form, the French Ligue 1 club announced. In a statement, Rennes said Lamouchi had been "suspended" and reserve team coach Julien Stephan been put in temporary charge of the first team. The 47-year-old Lamouchi is unlikely to return, meaning Sunday's chastening 4-1 home defeat against Strasbourg will be the last of his year-long spell in charge in Brittany. Rennes are currently 14th in Ligue 1, four points clear of the relegation zone before tomorrow's trip to Lyon.

LA LIGA

Sevilla surrender lead to Barca after Alaves draw

Reuters
Vitoria-Gastiez, Spain

Sevilla slipped off the top of La Liga on Sunday night as they could only draw 1-1 at Alaves, whose comfortable protection of their unbeaten home record allowed champions Barcelona to climb back to the league's summit. Alaves' winger Jony slammed the ball into the roof of the net from close range to give them the lead in the 37th minute, despite protests from Sevilla that Jonathan Calleri was in an offside position when he provided the cross for the goal.

Home goalkeeper Fernando Pacheco made a fine save to prevent Franco Vazquez equalising soon after the break but could not stop Wissam Ben

Yedder's 78th minute equaliser, as the Frenchman nipped in behind the defence to turn in Pablo Sarabia's cross.

It meant Alaves, who beat European champions Real Madrid 1-0 at their Mendizorrotza stadium earlier in the campaign, and Atletico Madrid remain the only teams yet to lose at home in the league this season. The Basque side resisted Sevilla's attempts to grab a late winner with some ease and almost won themselves when Darko Brasanac headed against the post and keeper Tommas Vaclik nearly pushed the ball over the line before finally grabbing hold.

Sevilla slid down to second place in the standings on 27 points after 14 games, one behind leaders Barca. Atletico Madrid are third on 25, while Alaves are fourth with 24, one point above fifth-placed Real Madrid.

Earlier, Ousmane Dembele took another step on the road to redemption as Barcelona eased past Villarreal. Dembele, dropped last month by coach Ernesto Valverde, was making his second consecutive start and repaid the faith by teeing up Gerard Pique's opening goal in a comfortable 2-0 win at the Camp Nou.

Carles Alena, the 20-year-old Spaniard also regarded as a star of the future, came off the bench to add a late flourish, chipping in his first La Liga goal and Barca's second after a defence-splitting pass from Lionel Messi. "Alena has earned his step up to the first team," Valverde said. Villarreal stayed 17th, with the pressure mounting on coach Javier Calleja, who has overseen only one league win since September. Alena, a dainty attacking midfielder

with 13 years training in Barca's academy, is likely to enjoy many more celebrations in front of the club's fans but for Dembele, the sense was time had been running out.

Valverde's patience with the 21-year-old appeared to be wearing thin when he was dropped against Real Betis three weeks ago but a late equaliser against Atletico earned a reprieve, and this was another lively performance.

"He played a great game and was one of our outstanding players," Valverde said. "He has so many assets - penetration, dribbling, shooting, speed, confidence, daring. Let's hope it continues like this."

Heartening too for Valverde will have been the clean sheet, Barcelona's first in the league since the second game of the season back in August.



Sevilla's Andre Silva (left) shoots past Alaves' Pina during the La Liga match at the Mendizorrotza stadium in Vitoria, Spain on Sunday night. (AFP)

QNB STARS LEAGUE

Salal's Rhaili out for the season with cruciate ligament injury

Umm Salal defender Adil Rhaili has been ruled out for the rest of the season with a cruciate ligament injury. The Moroccan damaged his knee during their goalless draw against Al Ahli in Week 14 of the QNB Stars League last Friday.

It will take at least six months for him to be back in action following the surgery and rehabilitation programme. Rhaili is one of the standout defenders in the QNB Stars League.

He has been a key member of the Umm Salal squad ever since he joined The Orange Fortress at the beginning of last season.



Umm Salal, eighth in the QNB Stars League table with 17 points, will host Al Arabi in Week 15 at the Al Gharafa Stadium on 8th December.

FOCUS

Maradona's Mexican club fall short in final

AFP
San Luis Potosi, Mexico

Diego Maradona's new club, Dorados, fell just short of winning the Mexican second-division final and a shot at promotion on Sunday, abruptly ending the Cinderella story of the Argentine legend's latest foray into coaching.

Dorados, from the western state of Sinaloa, lost their second-leg final to Atletico San Luis, who pulled off a 4-2 victory in extra time at home to win the title series 4-3 on aggregate. Maradona raised eyebrows when it was announced in September he was taking the managing job at struggling Dorados, who were then in 13th place in their 15-team league.

Sceptics questioned what interest the 1986 World Cup champion from Argentina, who has publicly battled drug addiction and alcoholism, could have in moving to a place better known for drug



Mexican second division club Dorados' coach Diego Maradona reacts during the final against Atletico San Luis in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, on Sunday. (AFP)

cartels than football.

But he answered his critics with an emphatic series of wins, improbably coaching the team to the championship and within spitting distance of promotion to the first division. Maradona, 58, had to watch the match from the stands, after

being sent off near the end of Dorados' first-leg victory for launching a tirade against the officials when he thought his team should have been awarded a penalty.

His club opened the scoring in the central city of San Luis Potosi, and claimed the lead again in the 57th minute after

the hosts equalised. That second Dorados goal, in particular, elicited a euphoric celebration from El Diego, who used a walkie-talkie throughout the match to give orders to his assistant coach, Luis Islas, on the sideline. But San Luis tied it up again nine minutes later on a Dorados own goal, and then drove home two more of their own - the latter in extra time, courtesy of Argentine Leandro Torres - to claim the match and the series.

Maradona's arrival has fuelled unprecedented interest in the Mexican second division. A plethora of Maradona scarves, jerseys and other merchandise was on offer outside the stadium ahead of the match. Ecstatic Dorados fans had travelled more than 12 hours by car for the match. This would have been the first coaching championship for Maradona, whose managerial career has lacked the sparkle of his playing days. His previous coaching jobs included teams ranging from the Argentine national side to clubs in his home country and the Middle East.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Small is beautiful for Arsenal as Torreira fits in perfectly

A decade after Gilberto left the Emirates, Arsenal look to have at last found a defensive midfielder of similar stature in the powerful pocket-sized Uruguayan

By Jonathan Wilson
The Guardian

So it turns out what Arsenal had been missing all this time has been an energetic deep-lying midfielder. Who knew? It was entirely fitting that it should be Lucas Torreira who rounded off their 4-2 victory in the north London derby against Tottenham on Sunday; he had been the key player in the game, not just for what he did with the ball, and without it, but because of what he embodies.

In the days of the debilitating niceness, Arsenal would probably not have come back from conceding two goals in quick succession just after the half-hour. Late-period Arsene Wenger would have bemoaned his luck, made arch comments about the disputed penalty, and everybody would have wondered just how Arsenal could end up losing so disappointingly having started so well.

Nor, you suspect, would Wenger have made the decisive tactical switch Unai Emery did after 71 minutes, bringing Matteo Guendouzi on for Shkodran Mustafi and changing from 3-4-2-1 to 4-3-3 to combat Tottenham's switch from 4-3-3 to 3-4-2-1 a few minutes earlier. Tottenham had started the game with a midfield diamond before adjusting their shape at half-time as it became apparent that the narrowness of their midfield was merely not overwhelming the lesser numbers of a Torreira-fuelled Arsenal in the centre, but was opening the flanks to the home full-backs, Sead Kolasinac in particular. This was a game of big, bold tactical changes and it was Emery who came

out on top.

But Torreira had a huge role in helping him to do that, adept playing just in front of the back four as part of the 3-4-2-1, allowing Granit Xhaka to operate as a more creative player alongside him, and just as effective pushing higher after the switch – which was, of course, what allowed him to make the run into the box that brought the fourth goal.

His impact on the side has been extraordinary. In the 965 minutes he has played, Arsenal have scored 28 and conceded 11. In the 295 he has not, they have scored four and conceded nine. Arsenal are yet to lose a game Torreira has started.

He's not just a ball-winner, though: his pass completion rate is at almost 90%. In that sense, although he developed at Institución Atlético 18 de Julio (whose badge he wears tattooed on his calf) rather than a national academy, Torreira represents Oscar Tabarez's ideal of the new Uruguayan player.

Tabarez, who has effectively run Uruguayan football since 2006, spent much of the summer telling anybody who would listen that when his country beat Brazil to win the 1950 World Cup they committed only 11 fouls. This, he insisted, was proof that Uruguay's historical style was tough but not brutal, that it was possible to be committed without being dirty.

He has worked over the past 12 years to re-establish technical ability rather than aggression as the defining feature of a Uruguayan midfielder, which is why the national team is now staffed not by the likes of Egidio Arevalo Rios and Diego Perez but by Rodrigo Bentancur, Matias Vecino and Torreira.

The most disappointing thing about



Lucas Torreira celebrates after scoring the final goal, and his first for Arsenal, in Sunday's 4-2 north London derby win over Spurs. (AFP)

Torreira, perhaps, is the song with which Arsenal fans salute him. Although in repackaging an old favourite about Patrick Vieira, his role in the team is acknowledged, the line "he's only five foot five". (Given Torreira comes from Fray Bentos, famed for its meat packing plant, and last year bought a butcher's

shop for his family you wonder if it's too late to change that line to "He likes a corned-beef pie".)

He is, though, undeniably short for a Premier League player. A photograph from the first half on Sunday that showed him challenging Dele Alli, thanks to a trick of perspective, made

him look like a Lilliputian surprising Gulliver by thrusting an arm across his chest and whipping the ball off his toes.

Sunday felt like a major moment for Arsenal, a day on which they flirted with carelessness and rejected it, in which their manager came out on top in a major tactical battle. But most signif-

icant perhaps is the proof that, at last they have solved the problem at the back of midfield. The answer was not Mikel Arteta, or Francis Coquelin, or Mohamed Elneny, or Granit Xhaka, but it looks as though it may be Torreira. A decade after Gilberto Silva left the club, he has at last been replaced.

SERIE A

Roma and Inter share spoils in thriller

AFP
Milan

Roma battled back for a 2-2 draw which denied Inter Milan second place in Serie A on Sunday night in a Stadio Olimpico thriller between two sides looking to impress after losing in Europe during the week.

Keita Balde Diao gave Inter the half-time lead amid Roma fury at having a penalty appeal denied, but the side from the capital powered back with a Cendiz Under scorcher after the break. Aleksandar Kolarov slotted in a penalty to seal a point for the Romans to cancel out Inter captain Mauro Icardi's header.

Inter – who lost to Tottenham Hotspur in the Champions League midweek – remain third, level on 29 points with second-placed Napoli who were playing Atalanta last night. Champions Juventus opened up an 11-point lead on Napoli with a 3-0 win at Fiorentina on Saturday with Cristiano Ronaldo scoring from the spot to bag his 10th goal in 14 games.

"It was a very entertaining match for all watching and I think a valuable point for both teams," said Inter coach Luciano Spalletti. "It shows we are on the right track."

Roma – who advanced to the Champions League knockout rounds despite losing to Real Madrid – have only won one of their last six league matches and are down in seventh place. Eusebio Di Francesco's side were furious they were denied a penalty call after Danilo D'Ambrosio tripped Nicolò Zaniolo before Keita broke through after 37 minutes.

D'Ambrosio then set up Senegalese winger Keita to blast in a volley from close range. "It's shameful," said AS Roma legend Francesco Totti. "I want to know, and we all do, how those in the VAR booth didn't see that foul. We all saw it on a far smaller screen."

Turkish winger Under pulled Roma level six minutes after the break rifling in from distance to stun Samir Handanovic in the Inter goal. Icardi rose to head in a corner on 66 minutes before Kolarov slotted in a penalty on 73 awarded after Marcelo Brozovic's arm touched the ball.

The match ended in drama with former Roma boss Spalletti banished from the sidelines for dissent to cheers from the Stadio Olimpico crowd.

Inter are now four points ahead of city rivals AC Milan who moved fourth after Patrick Cutrone and Franck Kessie sealed a 2-1 comeback win over promoted Parma. Lazio dropped to fifth a point back after being held 1-1 at bottom club Chievo.

It was a hard-fought victory for Milan who have a number of injured players out



AS Roma's Aleksandar Kolarov (left) and Inter Milan's Matteo Politano go for a header during the Serie A match at Stadio Olimpico in Rome on Sunday night. (Reuters)

along with suspended Argentine forward Gonzalo Higuain.

Roberto Inglese nodded in his fourth goal this season for Parma from a corner five minutes after the break but Milan pulled one back six minutes later thanks to Cutrone volleying home. Kessie slotted in Milan's second from the spot on 71 minutes after Alessandro Bastoni was deemed after consultation with VAR to have handled the ball. Parma drop to ninth and are now five points behind AC Milan who occupy the final Champions League berth.

In Verona, Ciro Immobile grabbed a point for Lazio against a Chievo side still looking for their first win of the season, but who held

Napoli 0-0 last weekend. Chievo captain Sergio Pellissier, 39, opened for the hosts after 25 minutes, as Lazio were unable to turn their domination into goals.

Italy forward Immobile finally broke through after 66 minutes for his ninth goal of the season following a one-two with Argentine Joaquin Correa. Immobile rattled the bar ten minutes later but Simone Inzaghi's side were unable to find the three points and drop to fifth.

Earlier Torino – with coach Walter Mazzarri back on the bench after a health scare – rallied past 10-man Genoa 2-1 to move sixth. Sassuolo dropped out of the European places following a goalless draw at Udinese.

FOCUS

Hughes sacked by Southampton

AFP
London

Mark Hughes has been sacked as manager of Southampton after just eight months in charge, the struggling Premier League club announced yesterday, despite an improved performance in a 2-2 draw with Manchester United.

The Welshman, 55, took over at St Mary's in March and guided them to Premier League survival as well as an FA Cup semi-final but was unable to inspire a better campaign this season. Former RB Leipzig boss Ralph Hasenhuetl is reportedly the front-runner to replace Hughes – the new boss will be Southampton's fourth permanent manager in 18 months. "We would like to express our thanks to Mark and his staff for all of their efforts during their time at St Mary's," the club said in a statement. "The search for a new manager to take the club forward is already under way. First team assistant coach Kelvin Davis will lead the team for tomorrow's Premier League game against Tottenham Hotspur at Wembley."

Assistant first team manager Mark Bowen and assistant first team coach Eddie Niedzwiecki have also left the club. Southampton, who were 2-0 up against Jose Mourinho's United at home



on Saturday at one stage, are 18th in the Premier League, just one point ahead of bottom club Fulham.

They have won just one of their 14 Premier League matches this season under Hughes, suffering seven defeats. The former Manchester United, Barcelona and Chelsea forward signed for Southampton as a player towards the end of an illustrious career.

During his subsequent coaching career he has managed Wales as well as Blackburn, Manchester City and Stoke. Asked if being given control only up until tomorrow's Tottenham trip suggests a permanent appointment

will happen before the weekend, Davis said: "To me it does indicate that. But whether that happens or not will be up to the guys upstairs. I'm taking the team up until Wednesday and we'll see after that."

The former Saints goalkeeper revealed his pride at taking temporary charge of the club but said he would not look beyond tomorrow's match. "The opportunity I've got now is to take the lads for a couple of days' training and to prepare for the Tottenham game," said Davis. "After that is after that. I don't think it would be wise to even consider anything after that."

Croatia court drops false testimony charges against Modric

Zagreb: Real Madrid's Luka Modric, FIFA's footballer of the year, will not face charges of giving false testimony in the criminal trial of his former boss at Dinamo Zagreb, who was convicted in June of evading tax and siphoning transfer fees from the club. A Croatian appeals court rejected a request by prosecutors to have charges reinstated against the Croatian international midfielder that had been thrown out by a lower court. "The (Zagreb county) court rejected the appeal by the

state attorney and confirmed the first-instance decision that there was not a sufficient level of evidence to raise an indictment," the court's spokesman Kresimir Devcic told reporters.

Modric testified last year at the trial of a tax official and three former senior officials from Dinamo Zagreb, including its former chief executive Zdravko Mamic. In June, Mamic was sentenced to six-and-a-half years jail for siphoning millions of dollars in transfer fees from the club, including part of the

\$16.5m the club was paid when Modric moved to Tottenham Hotspur in 2008. Despite his conviction, Mamic is at large and living in Bosnia. Prosecutors accused Modric of giving false testimony at the trial about the dates when he signed annexes to his professional contracts which covered transfer fees.

In September Croatia's state attorney also charged another Croatia international, Liverpool defender Dejan Lovren, with the same offence as Modric. That case is still pending.

NATIONS LEAGUE

England's Southgate warns of Koeman's Dutch revolution

The draw in Dublin also produced a meeting of host nation Portugal and Switzerland in the last four

AFP
Dublin

England manager Gareth Southgate lauded Ronald Koeman for his transformation of the Netherlands' fortunes after the two nations were paired together in the semi-finals of the inaugural Nations League yesterday.

The draw in Dublin also produced a meeting of host nation Portugal and Switzerland in the last four for the right to reach the final. The third-place playoff and final will take place on June 9, with the latter game being staged in Porto. All four sides qualified for UEFA's new competition – designed to replace meaningless friendly matches with competitive internationals – by winning their three-team groups in the top tier of the Nations League.

As England were reaching the semi-finals of the World Cup in July, the Dutch had to watch from afar after failing to qualify for a second major tournament in a row.

England won a friendly 1-0 in Koeman's first match in charge in Amsterdam in March, but in his first competitive campaign, the Netherlands beat both world champions France and Germany to a place in the last four of the Nations League. "We play a team in Holland at a similar stage to us, developing, exciting young players and I can see the impact Ronald has already made with that team," said Southgate, whose side will face the Dutch in the northern Portuguese city of Guimaraes on June 6.

Koeman believes his side's return to form in recent months has restored the pride of Dutch fans in their national team after a lean few years. "It was difficult the time when we started with the players. We had two big tournaments we didn't qualify for. The best compliment for the players is again the people in Holland are proud of the national team." The former Everton manager was just as complimentary about Southgate's impact on the Three Lions and in particular his willingness to field young players, something which has traditionally characterised Dutch football.

"We know it's always a battle between England and Holland. We have a lot of respect for the English team and



England manager Gareth Southgate (right) and his Netherlands counterpart Ronald Koeman address a press conference in Dublin yesterday. (AFP)

we have a lot of players in the Premier League," said Koeman. "The way Gareth is managing the English team is how we like (in the Netherlands). He's giving opportunities to young players."

However, there could be disappointment for some travelling fans as the Dom Afonso Henriques stadium in Guimaraes holds just 30,000 with England and the Dutch both expected to bring a strong support. England came from behind to late on to beat Croatia 2-1 at Wembley last month and leap from bottom of a group also including Spain to

the top. The Netherlands also needed a late show to edge out world champions France by scoring twice in the final five minutes in a 2-2 draw away to Germany.

The 50,000-capacity Estadio do Dragao in Porto will host Portugal's meeting with Switzerland on June 5 and the final. "We are hosting this in our country, with our people, and that brings extra responsibility," said Portugal coach Fernando Santos. "We have the dream of getting to the final and winning the trophy."

Santos, though, was coy when ques-

tioned if Cristiano Ronaldo would return to his side having missed all four Nations League fixtures to date. With the Champions League final just four days before Portugal's semi-final, Santos hinted that could hinder his preparation and affect any decision on Ronaldo's participation.

"These final games will be decided by the players and it is very close to the Champions League and Europa League finals. It will have an influence on the Nations League and may influence our preparation."

European champions Portugal were unbeaten in four games against Poland and Italy to secure their place and the honour of hosting the tournament.

Switzerland shocked Belgium by bouncing back from 2-0 down to beat the number one ranked side in the world 5-2 last month to make the last four. Vladimir Petkovic's side also beat Portugal in World Cup qualifying two years ago and he is hopeful of pulling off another upset. "You go to these tournaments to win them," said Petkovic. "We are ready to make a surprise in June."

Aguero gives Man City injury scare

London: Pep Guardiola said he was warned by club doctors that top scorer Sergio Aguero could be ruled out until January if he aggravated a muscle injury. The Argentina international missed Saturday's 3-1 win over Bournemouth and is doubtful to face Watford and Chelsea this week.

"The doctors told me (on Friday) Sergio cannot play," Guardiola said. "If he plays, maybe it's four or five weeks off. In that situation, this month, with a lot of games, he was not safe."

City's all-time top scorer appears unlikely to make the trip to Vicarage Road on Tuesday or Stamford Bridge on Saturday. "Right now, I'm not quite sure," Guardiola said when asked about the availability of Aguero, who has eight Premier League goals this season. "I speak with the doctors every day, they make a report and a briefing," he added. "They say 'ready' or 'not ready' and we decide."

Gabriel Jesus started against Bournemouth in Aguero's absence but was unable to add to his single league goal so far this season for the Premier League pace-setters. Aguero's form has limited the Brazilian's playing time recently but the 21-year-old said he was ready to contribute if needed following his own injury concerns, which saw him miss last week's Champions League win over Lyon.

"I've been training really hard, maybe that's why I felt something in my groin last week," Jesus said. "Unfortunately I was out of the Champions League match that I really wanted to play. I always make it clear for Pep that I'm here to help the team regardless of how. Obviously that I want to play more minutes, but I respect who is playing at the moment."



SPOTLIGHT

Spurs fan arrested after banana skin thrown onto Arsenal pitch

AFP
London

A football fan has been arrested after a banana skin was thrown onto the pitch at the Emirates Stadium as Arsenal forward Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang celebrated scoring a penalty in front of Tottenham fans.

The Gunners won a memorable match 4-2 on Sunday and London's Metropolitan Police afterwards confirmed that seven arrests had been made. Press Association reported that one of those arrests came after a banana skin was hurled from the away end as Aubameyang celebrated scoring in front of the Tottenham fans. "Behaviour such as this is completely unacceptable and the supporter in question will be issued with a ban," a Tottenham spokesman said. There were also six arrests for public order offences – at least two of which are believed to be Arsenal supporters who lit smoke canisters during the match. Former Arsenal and England forward Ian Wright, speaking as a pundit,

said: "I've played against Spurs and I've taken a lot of abuse from Spurs but never ever has it been racial. Now Spurs have to deal with this because some idiot has done that. It's not only embarrassed Spurs but it has embarrassed the Premier League because it has gone around the world."

Gabon forward Aubameyang opened the scoring on Sunday with his 10th-minute spot-kick and, after Tottenham had replied through Eric Dier and a Harry Kane penalty, then equalised early in the second half. Alexandre Lacazette put the hosts 3-2 up before Lucas Torreira added Arsenal's fourth. The unrest was not restricted to the stands as the two sets of players had to be separated following Dier's equaliser on a feisty afternoon in north London.

The England midfielder celebrated by putting his finger to his lips, with Arsenal substitute Stephan Lichtsteiner reacting angrily to the gesture and referee Mike Dean showing Dier a yellow card. Both clubs were charged by the Football Association yesterday with failing to ensure their players conducted themselves in an orderly fashion over the melee that followed Dier's goal.



A banana skin was thrown on to the pitch after Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang celebrated scoring his side's first goal against Tottenham on Sunday. (AFP)

PREMIER LEAGUE

Pep urges Sterling to do even better

AFP
Manchester, United Kingdom

Pep Guardiola challenged in-form Manchester City forward Raheem Sterling yesterday to improve his game even further, despite his sparkling form for club and country. Sterling has recently been rewarded with a new five-year contract, worth a reported £300,000 (\$382,000) a week, by the Premier League leaders and is currently enjoying the best form of his career.

He is the Premier League's joint-leading English scorer, his eight goals matching Harry Kane's tally after the weekend games, and is joined by two others on top of the assists table. But Guardiola says his star cannot rest on his laurels and warned Premier League rivals that there is far more to come from the 23-year-old.

"He can do better," said the City boss. "We are so delighted with what he's done in three years but he can do better. He can be more consistent, his first touches, receptions, many things. Definitely – I've said many times we are delighted but he can do better."

Guardiola, speaking ahead of his side's trip to Watford today, leapt to the defence of Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp, who has faced criticism for his celebrations after his team's late victory over Everton on Sunday.

The German was charged by FA for sprinting onto the pitch but Guardiola, who was similarly criticised for his response to a late win against Southampton last season, can understand his actions. "I did it, against Southampton," said the City manager. "There's a lot of emotions in those moments. I know when I did it I was not happy to have done it."

"So I can understand (Everton manager) Marco Silva, (then Southampton manager) Mauricio Pellegrino when it happens. But sometimes it is what it is and it's an emotional game, everything happens in your mind. I talk from my side, you have to be respectful of the others."

Guardiola has also welcomed the an-



Manchester City's Raheem Sterling (right) has recently been rewarded with a new five-year contract, worth a reported £300,000 a week, by the Premier League leaders. (AFP)

nouncement that European governing body UEFA will introduce VAR for the knockout stages of the Champions League this season. City felt decisions went against them in last season's quarter-final defeat to Liverpool, especially when Leroy Sane had a goal ruled out in the tie at the Etihad.

"I welcome the news, I'm delighted with it," said the City manager. "The Premier League is the last one (to adopt VAR) and sooner or later it will happen. This season, our second goal against Shakhtar was a ridiculous penalty. It's so we don't have to talk about it or to talk about last season versus Liverpool."

"Now with VAR, we are looking to make better football, better decisions. Most of the time, not always, the ref will do a good job. Everyone makes mistakes and they'll be

helped by it and it will be good." Sergio Aguero and Alexander Zinchenko face late fitness tests before City travel to Watford.

Kevin De Bruyne is not yet ready to return to the first team.

PREMIER LEAGUE FIXTURES

Today: AFC Bournemouth vs Huddersfield Town; Brighton & Hove Albion vs Crystal Palace; West Ham United vs Cardiff City (all 19:45 GMT) Watford vs Manchester City (20:00)

Tomorrow: Burnley vs Liverpool; Fulham vs Leicester; Wolverhampton Wanderers vs Chelsea; Everton vs Newcastle United (all 19:45) Manchester United vs Arsenal (20:00); Tottenham Hotspur vs Southampton (20:00)