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United battle to draw with Arsenal, Reds march on

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GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

Pujara hits ton to save India from total collapse in first test

Page 2

CRICKET

Yasir gets record but it's advantage NZ in 3rd Test

Williamson and Nicholls star in unbeaten 212-run stand to put Pakistan on the back foot in Abu Dhabi

AFP
 Abu Dhabi

Record-breaking Yasir Shah had to share the day's honours with New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson yesterday as the third and final Test heads towards a gripping final day in Abu Dhabi.

The early part of the morning belonged to Yasir who collected the one wicket he needed to become the fastest man to reach 200 wickets in Test cricket.

The rest of the day, however, belonged to Williamson who played a masterly innings, and was 139 not out as the Kiwis reached 272-4 by the close.

Williamson had great support from Henry Nicholls who made 90 not out during an unbroken fifth wicket partnership of 212 that has given New Zealand a lead of 198 with six wickets remaining.

With the series tied at 1-1, the final day of this last Test promises to be fascinating with both sides capable of winning.

The day began in high anticipation with New Zealand resuming at 26-2 and Yasir taking the ball to bowl the third over.

He needed just one wicket to break a record set 82 years ago by the great Australian leg-spinner Clarrie Grimmett who had needed 36 Tests to reach the milestone of 200 Test wickets.

When Yasir trapped night-watchman Will Somerville leg before for four with his 13th delivery of the day, he reached the 200-wicket mark in just his 33rd Test.

"Ever since I knew this record it became my dream to take fastest 200 wickets and it came true today," said Yasir, who still hopes Pakistan can pull off a win.

"The wicket is slow but it is turning from the patches. We



New Zealand captain Kane Williamson (L) acknowledges the applause after notching a century as teammate Henry Nicholls looks on in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

want to bowl them and try to go for the chase. That is what we are going to try as there is still one full day left in the match."

Pakistan had hopes of an emphatic win once Shaheen Shah Afridi had Ross Taylor caught hooking for 22 with the total at 60-4. But they were undone by Williamson's masterclass and an innings from Nicholls that grew in confidence but, like his partner, enjoyed a touch of luck.

The key moment for Pakistan in the field came when Yasir

dropped Williamson on 87 off Bilal Asif when he failed to catch a full-blooded pull at square-leg.

Williamson, who scored 89 in the first innings, drove medium pacer Hasan Ali to the cover boundary for his 12th four to complete a well-deserved 19th Test century – his second against Pakistan.

Nicholls also survived a loud leg-before appeal off Yasir when on three, but Pakistan erred by not reviewing the not-out decision as the ball tracker showed it

would have hit the leg stump. Nicholls successfully challenged a leg-before verdict on nine and was dropped on 50 by Imam-ul-Haq off a luckless Yasir. He has so far hit eight boundaries.

Their partnership has improved the previous fifth-wicket record against Pakistan of 183 set by Mark Burgess and Robert Anderson in Lahore in 1976.

Yasir has figures of 2-107 while Shaheen has taken 2-55. Yasir, whose 14 wickets helped

Pakistan level the series 1-1 in Dubai, now has 27 wickets in the series. His 14 for 184 were the second best match figures in a Test for Pakistan, behind former captain and current prime minister of Pakistan Imran Khan, who bagged 14 for 116 against Sri Lanka in Lahore in 1982.

Yasir was also the fastest Pakistani to 50 wickets (nine Tests), and reached 100 wickets in 17 Tests – second only to Englishman George Lohmann who set the record of 16 in 1896.

SCORECARD

New Zealand 1st innings 274
 (K. Williamson 89, B.J. Watling 77 not out; Bilal Asif 5-65, Yasir Shah 3-75)

Pakistan 1st innings 348
 (Azhar Ali 134, Asad Shafiq 104; W. Somerville 4-75)

New Zealand 2nd innings (overnight 26-2)

J. Raval lbw b Shaheen0
 T. Latham c Sohail b Yasir10
 K. Williamson not out139
 W. Somerville lbw b Yasir4
 R. Taylor c Asif b Shaheen22
 H. Nicholls not out90

Extras: (b5, lb 1, nb 1)7
Total: (for four wks; 104 overs) 272

Still to bat: B.J. Watling, C. de Grandhomme, Ajaz Patel, T. Southee, T. Boult

Fall of wickets: 1-1 (Raval), 2-24 (Latham), 3-37 (Somerville), 4-60 (Taylor)

Bowling: Hasan 13-5-37-0, Shaheen 16-5-55-2, Yasir 37-8-107-2, Asif 36-6-62-0, Azhar 1-0-2-0, Hafeez 1-0-3-0

Toss: New Zealand

Umpires: Paul Reffel (AUS) and Ian Gould (ENG)

TV umpire: Bruce Oxenford (AUS)

Match referee: Javagal Srinath (IND)



Pakistani spinner Yasir Shah (C) celebrates with teammates after reaching 200 Test wickets in only his 33rd Test, beating Australian Clarrie Grimmett's long-standing mark of 200 wickets in 36 Tests.

QNB STARS LEAGUE

Big win for Al Rayyan, Gharafa beaten again

By Sports Reporter
 Doha

Al Rayyan eased past relegation-threatened Al Kharaitiyat 6-0, while Al Gharafa's bid to finish in the top four suffered another blow after they were beaten 3-1 by Al Ahli in the QNB Stars League yesterday.

Al Kharaitiyat were never going to pose any problems for the Lions – they have won only one of their 15 matches so far while losing 14 – and sure enough their struggles were plainly evident early on in the match when Ali Fayeze scored an own goal in the very first minute.

Al Rayyan captain Rodrigo Tabata, who picked up a loose ball inside the Al Kharaitiyat box, crossed to Sebastian Soria, but Fayeze deflected the ball into his own net with keeper Ahmed Sofyan in no position to stop the ball.

Soria (24th minute), Lucca



Al Rayyan players celebrate one of their goals against Al Kharaitiyat. Borges (69th and 84th), Tabata (71st) and Jonathan Menendez (84th) then produced classy goals to complete Al Rayyan's commanding show.

Al Rayyan doubled their lead through a combined effort from seasoned duo Tabata and Soria. The Al Rayyan skipper curled in a corner kick and Soria, stationed just a few metres away from Al Kharaitiyat goalmouth, back-headed the ball into the net with a short jump.

Al Rayyan went 3-0 up when Lucca headed home from an acute angle off a loopy cross that came his way.

The Lions jumped to a 4-0 cushion following a powerful drive by Tabata off a cross from Soria.

Lucca then drilled in a low deflection from close range off a cross from Menendez, who also netted a goal just a minute later following a cross from Khalfan Ibrahim.

Al Rayyan have 27 points from 15 matches and are in third position, behind leaders Al Duhail and second-placed Al Sadd.

Al Ahli, meanwhile jumped to fourth after their command-



Al Ahli have now gone eight matches without defeat.

ing win over Al Gharafa, who were thrashed 8-1 by Al Sadd last week.

Al Ahli have now gone eight matches without defeat, a sensational run for a team who were initially not favoured for a top-four finish.

Mohamed Muntari (first minute), Abdelrehman Mustafa (58th) and Nigel de Jong (83rd)

scored the goals for the visitors at the Al Gharafa Stadium, where Amro Seraj (37th) was on target for the home side.

In just the first minute of their Round 15 clash, following a loopy Mohsine Moutaouali cross that landed at his feet, Muntari outpaced his marker and shot the ball into the net for Al Ahli's first goal. The early strike brought a

huge smile to coach Milan Macala.

Al Gharafa equalised when Seraj made the most of a fumble by keeper Ivanildo Rodrigues. Stationed just a few feet away from Santos, who failed to pouch a low cross from the flank, Seraj quickly sent the ball into the net with a low right-foot drive. It was Seraj's third goal of the season.

A couple of minutes later, Al Gharafa's Ahmed Alaaeldin failed to send the ball into an open net from close range off a cross from the flank. Just two minutes before the end of first half, Al Ahli's Mohamed Reza was booked with a yellow for a reckless tackle in his own box.

In the second half, Mustafa helped Al Ahli take the lead with a left-footed drive from inside the Al Gharafa box with only keeper Ali to beat. It was Mustafa's third goal of the season.

De Jong then fired a bullet from 25 yards out into the net in spectacular fashion to complete the scoring.



REPORT

Pujara ton helps India claw back against Australia

'We'll learn from the mistakes and put up a better show in the second inning'

AFP
Adelaide

Cheteshwar Pujara scored a gritty 123 in punishing conditions to claw India back into the opening Test in Adelaide yesterday after Australia seized early control with some blistering bowling.

Nathan Lyon, Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc all grabbed two wickets as temperatures topped 36 Celsius (96.8 Fahrenheit) and the tourists wilted to 250-9 at stumps on day one. The experienced Pujara faced 246 balls in his gutsy knock — passing 5,000 Test runs for his 16th Test century — as the wickets tumbled around him, including superstar captain Virat Kohli for three. At the end of a day characterised by poor shot selection, Pujara went for a quick single on the second last ball and was removed in a brilliant run-out by a diving Cummins.

"To be honest we should have batted better but they also bowled well in the first two sessions and I knew that I had to stay patient and wait for the loose balls," said Pujara. We'll learn from the mistakes and put up a better show in the second innings."

Batting after Kohli won the toss, the visitors crumbled in a disastrous morning session under a pace barrage before digging

in later in the day, with Pujara and Ravi Ashwin (25 off 76 balls) staging a fightback as the bowlers tired. In their first home Test since the ball-tampering scandal in March, Australia took four wickets before lunch with the batsmen guilty of playing at deliveries they would have been better off leaving alone.

Australian bowling coach David Saker said it was a premeditated plan for the quicks to pitch it up and lure India's batsmen into false shots.

"We got the wickets the way we thought we might get the wickets," he told the Seven Network. Starc added that he felt the attack was excellent for much of the day, but they let it slip in the final hour.

But he was happy overall.

"If you'd said to us at the beginning of the day after losing the toss that we have them at 250-9, we'd have bitten your arm off," he said. Opener KL Rahul, who has been struggling for runs, flopped again, caught by Aaron Finch at third slip off Hazlewood for two.

Veteran Murali Vijay, in the side after young gun Prithvi Shaw suffered ankle ligament damage, didn't last much longer, caught behind by skipper Tim Paine off Starc for 11.

In marched Kohli to a huge roar from the crowd, but Usman Khawaja at gully spectacularly caught him off a Cummins delivery as he attempted a drive, out after facing only 16 balls. It was stunning one-handed take by Khawaja, whose preparations were upset by the shock arrest of his brother this week for allegedly framing a love-rival with a fake terror plot.

The dismissal of Kohli, who has scored five centuries in his two previous Test tours of Australia and rates Adelaide his favourite overseas ground, sparked wild celebrations. Vice captain Ajinkya Rahane and Pujara worked to steady the ship. But after returning from a break, Hazlewood enticed Rahane into a drive and he edged to Handscomb in the slips for 13. Rohit Sharma, preferred in the final XI to all-rounder Hanuma Vihari, had compiled a patient 31 when he swept Lyon for six, narrowly missing being caught on the ropes. Sharma then needlessly tried the same shot on the next ball, and this time debutant Marcus Harris comfortably collected the steeping catch, with the right-hander once more failing to capitalise on a good start.

It was left to Pujara, in his 65th Test, to stay at the crease and keep chipping away, building a 41-run partnership with Rishabh Pant and then 62 with Ashwin before he was run out by Cummins.



Lone ranger: India's Cheteshwar Pujara looks on after playing a shot during day one of the first Test against Australia at the Adelaide Oval yesterday.

FOCUS

Pujara rates century as one of his best ever

AFP
Adelaide

Cheteshwar Pujara scored past 5,000 Test runs and on the way scored one of his best centuries yesterday, with the experienced number three crediting a stint at Yorkshire for helping him prepare.

The 30-year-old compiled a patient 123 in hot and difficult conditions at Adelaide Oval to help India stay in the opening Test against Australia with 250-9 at stumps.

He rated his 16th Test ton as among his most memorable, hitting seven fours and two sixes in his 246-ball stay at the crease as wickets fell around him.

"It was one of my top innings in Test cricket, I could say top five. I can't rate whether it was one of the best but the teammates who were appreciating said that this is one of the best," he said.

Pujara began slowly, grinding out ones and twos, and only really started going after the bowlers as they tired towards the end of the day.

He was run out attempting a quick single on the second-last ball of the day by a diving Pat Cummins.

"I was a bit disappointed but I had to take that single because only the last two balls were left

and I thought I should be on strike, so I took the chance but he fielded brilliantly," he explained.

Pujara tends not to play much white ball cricket and said the extra time he had to prepare for the Test series had paid dividends.

He said his innings had demonstrated that he was as comfortable scoring runs overseas as at home.

"It means a lot (the century), but I would also like to say that people say that I've scored more runs in India," said the right-hander, who is playing his 65th Test.

"But at the same time you need to look at the number of matches we play in India. So I will obviously score runs there.

"At times I've had bad phases playing overseas but I still feel very confident when it comes to different conditions.

"Playing county cricket has helped me a lot, and playing in England conditions is always challenging and when you come to Australia you know that it is slightly better.

"And as I said, I had a pretty decent time to prepare before this Test series."

Pujara has had two stints as an overseas player for county side Yorkshire, in 2015 and again during the recent English summer. He has also appeared for Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

South Africa call on uncapped Hamza for Pakistan series

Cape Town: South Africa have named uncapped middle-order batsman Zubayr Hamza and fast bowler Duanne Olivier in their squad for the three-Test home series against Pakistan starting in Pretoria on Boxing Day. Cape Town-born Hamza, 23, averages almost 50 in first class cricket but has had a modest domestic season to date with two fifties in nine innings and an average of a little over 31. The right-hander, who bats at number three for his provincial Cape Cobras side, has been rewarded for his excellent form over the last 18 months though and his potential as a future regular in the team.

"Zubayr has been one of the standout cricketers in domestic cricket over the past year and carried that form into the South Africa A tour to India where he averaged over 50 in the four-day series against tough opposition and under tough conditions," Cricket South Africa national selection panel (NSP) convenor Linda Zondi said in a media statement yesterday. "Before that, he had an outstanding season in the four-day franchise competition where he scored 823 runs,

including three centuries, at the impressive average of 69. "His selection is part of our vision for the future as we start to feed new players into the system. It is inevitable that some of our senior players will start thinking of retiring in years to come and it is vital that we have a good succession plan in place." South Africa have also recalled Olivier as a replacement for the injured Lungi Ngidi, who will miss the entire Pakistan tour that also includes five One-Day Internationals and three Twenty20 fixtures.

The Proteas have retained experienced batsman Hashim Amla despite a poor run of form that has seen him top-score with 31 in his last nine test innings and continually fail in domestic cricket, with the selection of Hamza possibly much to do with Amla's struggles. Fast bowler Dale Steyn will hope to get the one wicket he needs to pass Shaun Pollock as the country's highest test wicket-taker and has been in excellent bowling form in domestic cricket. The second test will be played in Cape Town from Jan 3-7, with the series finale in Johannesburg from Jan 11-15.

SCORECARD

India first innings

M. Vijay c Paine b Starc11
K.L. Rahul c Finch b Hazlewood. 2
C. Pujara run out (Cummins) ...123
V. Kohli c Khawaja b Cummins ...3
A. Rahane c Handscomb b Hazlewood13
R. Sharma c Harris b Lyon37
R. Pant c Paine b Lyon25
R. Ashwin c Handscomb b Cummins25
I. Sharma b Starc4
M. Shami not out6

Extras (lb) 1

Total (9 wickets, 87.5 overs) 250

To bat: Jasprit Bumrah

Fall of wickets: 1-3 (Rahul), 2-15 (Vijay), 3-19 (Kohli), 4-41 (Rahane), 5-86 (Sharma), 6-127 (Pant), 7-189 (Ashwin), 8-210 (Sharma), 9-250 (Pujara)

Bowling: Starc 19-4-63-2, Hazlewood 19-5-3-52-2, Cummins 19-3-49-2, Lyon 28-2-83-2, Head 21-2-0

Australia: Marcus Harris, Aaron Finch, Usman Khawaja, Shaun Marsh, Travis Head, Peter Handscomb, Tim Paine (capt), Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins, Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Starc
Toss: India

BOTTOMLINE

Record brings Yasir into spinners' hall of fame

AFP
Abu Dhabi

Six years to the day after the great Clarrie Grimmett took his final breath in Adelaide, Yasir Shah filled his lungs for the first time, in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan.

They are two leg spinners divided by eras and continents, but joined by a world record that lasted for 82 years until Yasir lifted it from Grimmett's shoulders yesterday.

Half an hour into the fourth day's play in Abu Dhabi, Yasir skidded a quicker ball through the defence of New Zealand nightwatchman Will Somerville and into his pads.

The umpire's finger went up and Yasir had reached 200 wickets in just his 33rd Test, shattering Grimmett's record of 36 Tests set against South Africa in 1936.

"When I started playing cricket I never dreamt of this record, never" said

Yasir Shah prostrates as he celebrates breaking Clarrie Grimmett's record in Abu Dhabi yesterday.



Yasir. "I didn't even think of ever playing for Pakistan, so having done this much is an extraordinary thing for me."

The 32-year-old admitted that while he was a big fan of the legendary Australian leg-spinner Shane Warne, he knew little about Grimmett.

"I learned a lot from watching footage of Warne's bowling on YouTube," remembered Yasir. "Never saw Grimmett but when I read the chart of fastest to 200 wickets his name came first. Now it will be mine."

Apart from the May 2 coincidence — Grimmett died in 1980 while Yasir was born on that day in 1986 — both men share the peculiar record of never having taken a single Test wicket in the country of their birth.

Grimmett was born in Otago in New Zealand but migrated to Australia where he graduated from Victoria to play 37 Tests for Australia, taking 216 wickets in a glorious career.

He never played in New Zealand and nor did he bowl against his country of birth.

Yasir, too, has never played international cricket in Pakistan.

He only broke into top-level cricket in 2011 — two years after all cricket was suspended in Pakistan following attacks on the Sri Lankan team bus in March 2009. His home Tests have been played in UAE.

While Grimmett made a longer-lasting impression on first-class cricket with 1,424 wickets in 248 first-class matches with an astonishing 127 five wicket haul, Yasir has a modest first-class record with just over 500 wickets.

Among leg-spinners, neither comes close to Warne who 708 wickets in 145 Tests. The Australian ended a glorious career in 2007 second only to all-time highest Muttiah Muralitharan, the Sri Lankan off-spinner who took an astonishing 800 scalps in 133 Tests.

Pakistan had plenty of master spinners before Yasir, notably Abdul Qadir (236 wickets), Danish Kaneria (261) and Saqlain Mushtaq (208) but the

speed at which Yasir has taken wickets singles him out.

Since taking seven wickets on his debut against Australia in 2014, he has been a key figure in the Pakistan side.

He took 12 wickets in that 2-0 series win over Australia in UAE, 15 against New Zealand in a 1-1 draw the same year and 24 wickets against Sri Lanka in 2015.

Shah took 10 in a match to beat England at Lord's a year later. He took 21 and 25 wickets respectively in series wins over the West Indies.

He was the fastest Pakistani to 50 wickets (nine Tests) and the quickest Asian to 100 wickets (17 Tests), second only to Englishman George Lohmann who reached the target in one Test fewer in Johannesburg in 1896.

"My goal is to be remembered as one of the best spinners to have played cricket, and moreover, a match winner for my country," says Yasir who will have the chance to begin his quest for 300 when the third Test resumes today morning.

GOLF

'Good preparation vital for Presidents Cup success'

Reuters
Melbourne

Tiger Woods learned the hard way two decades ago how important preparation was for Presidents Cup success and he is determined to leave nothing to chance when he captains the United States at next year's edition at Royal Melbourne.

The 42-year-old has already expressed his disquiet about his own World Challenge tournament being scheduled for the week before the December 12-15 clash against an International team of players from the rest of the world, excluding Europe.

Anyone playing the World Challenge 16,000kms away in the Bahamas will not get to Australia until Tuesday - only 48 hours before the start of the Presidents Cup - and Woods said he needed to ensure they would still be fresh. "We have to figure out some logistical things between

now and then," the 14-times major champion told reporters in Melbourne yesterday.

"We've got (to) try and get the best field we can at the (World Challenge), as well as getting everyone here from the Bahamas to this tournament, get them rested, getting them prepared and getting them ready to play and compete."

Woods said the experience of 1998 at Royal Melbourne, when he was part of the only U.S. team to lose to the internationals, illustrated how important it was that the Americans were ready to go.

"The guys took quite a bit of time off, and quite frankly, we weren't prepared to play, and we got smoked," he recalled. "The internationals came out ready, prepared, played, and they drummed us. My job is to make sure that the guys are prepared, they're still playing and trying to stay fresh and competitive late in the year."

Woods reiterated that he wanted to be a playing captain but said he would consult with

his vice captains and teammates over whether to pick himself if he failed to qualify as one of the automatic selections.

"After the Tour Championship, we'll have our top eight guys, and hopefully I'll be part of the top eight," he said.

"If not, then (we) are going to have to figure out... who are the next four guys that will be best served to be part of this team."

"I don't know if I'll be a part of that conversation either way, as a player, but as a captain, yeah, I'll be a part of it."

Woods, a non-playing vice-captain at the 2017 edition, said taking charge of the Presidents Cup team was "special" and that he had a good idea of what kind of captain he wanted to be.

"Well, one that leads our team to a victory, one that the guys will have a lot of fun and respect," he said. "And one that'll create an environment where it'll be a moment and a week that they'll remember for the rest of their lives."



Tiger Woods putts golf balls during a media conference in Melbourne yesterday. (EPA)

HOCKEY WORLD CUP

France stun Olympic champs Argentina

'We were struggling to create opportunities and their defence was really sound. The goal we scored and then taking our goalie off gave us a little bit of momentum'



France's Victor Charlet scores against Argentina during the group stage match at the 2018 Hockey World Cup in Bhubaneswar yesterday. (AFP)

FIH
Bhubaneswar

In what turned out to be the biggest upset of the ongoing men's hockey World Cup, minnows France yesterday outclassed Olympic champions Argentina 5-3 in their final must-win pool A fixture to keep their quarter-final dreams alive.

A 5-3 victory for France against Los Leones was undoubtedly the biggest shock of the competition so far, upsetting the FIH Hero World Rankings both in terms of the result and the effect on the final standings in the pool, with the European side finishing above higher-ranked New Zealand on goal difference and eliminating neighbours Spain from the competition.

Spain started the day two points behind opponents New Zealand but established a commanding 2-0 lead going into half time. Albert Beltran's backhand shot flew into the roof of the New Zealand goal after just nine minutes, with the advantage being doubled by a close-range effort from Alvaro Iglesias two minutes before the end of the second quarter.

New Zealand had a mountain to climb, but they proved wor-

thy of the challenge. Following a scoreless third quarter, Hayden Phillips produced a moment of magic to drag his team back into the game, smashing into the top corner with nine minutes remaining.

Sensing the come-back was on, Black Sticks head coach Darren Smith replaced his goalkeeper with an outfield player to increase the pressure on the Europeans. It works wonders, with Kane Russell scoring a low penalty corner drag-flick to move New Zealand up to second in the pool.

"It's a pretty good feeling in the end, but we probably didn't control the game too well," said goal-scorer Kane Russell.

"We were struggling to create opportunities and their defence was really sound. The goal we scored and then taking our goalie off gave us a little bit of momentum."

For Spain, the draw against the Black Sticks moved them temporarily into third in the table, a point ahead of France, who needed to get a result against Olympic champions and Pool A winners Argentina if they were to progress into the knockout stages. A win for France was enough for a second-place finish, but with an 18-place difference in the World Rankings,

it was always going to be a big ask. However, the crowd at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium were in for a treat as the lowest ranked team in the competition produced something verging on the unbelievable.

France stormed into a stormed into a 4-1 half time lead against their illustrious opponents, with Hugo Genestet, Victor Charlet, Aristide Coisne and Gaspard Baumgarten on target for the Europeans, with Lucas Martinez scoring for Los Leones. It was a fantasy half-time score-line for France, putting them within touching distance of a remarkable second place finish in the pool and would subsequently eliminate Spain from the competition.

Although the lead held by France was a commanding one, Argentina have proven many times down the years that they are capable of coming back from unlikely positions. Gonzalo Peillat's low penalty corner just before the end of the third quarter gave the South Americans hope, setting up a very exciting final quarter.

Another ferocious penalty corner drag-flick from Peillat made it 4-3 at the start of the fourth period, but it was France who had the last say when Francois Goyet deflected home to seal an extraordinary 5-3 victory to move into the

cross-over play-offs as the second placed finisher in Pool A.

It's really amazing, an incredible game for us," said Player of the Match Hugo Genestet after the match.

"I think the first half was almost perfect, although we stepped down a little bit after half time. They scored with one of the best drag flickers in the world, but our fifth goal was really cool, arriving at a good moment. We know we can beat every team in this competition, but 5-3 against the Olympic champion and to finish second in the pool, it's incredible."

Despite the result, it was a milestone day for Argentina's Agustin Mazzilli, who made his 200th senior international appearance for Los Leones.

Today, the final matches in Pool B will take place. Australia, already confirmed as winners of this pool, take on undefeated China at 1700IST before Ireland and England meet at 1900IST. China currently sit second in the pool with two points, while Ireland and England sit third and fourth respectively, level on points but separated by goal difference. The pool winner will earn a direct ticket to the quarter finals, while the teams that finish second and third will go into the cross-over play-offs. The team

that finishes fourth will be eliminated from the competition.

Assessing Australia's fine start at the Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup Bhubaneswar 2018, Kookaburras defender Matthew Swann - a member of the World Cup winning squads from Delhi 2010 and The Hague 2014 - said: "Two wins, we're sitting pretty at the moment in our pool. We're happy with that but we know it's a long road to go. There's a lot of good competition ahead of us. We're not getting too far ahead of ourselves. There's a lot of work to do. We're hopefully going to keep building from the England game."

Speaking ahead of his team's head-to-head with Ireland, England co-captain George Pinner said: "I was really pleased with large parts of our performance last match [against Australia]. We stuck to the game plan and were very much in the game. The final score-line [3-0 defeat] is frustrating but I think there are lots of positives for us to build on and take into the final group game. The Ireland match is a big game, but we have been in this position before. We will do everything we can to prepare properly both mentally and physically to give ourselves the best chance of progressing."

FOCUS

Oosthuizen earns early advantage at South African Open

Reuters
Johannesburg

Home favourite Louis Oosthuizen wielded a red-hot putter to bag six birdies on his back nine and card an opening round 62 for a one-shot lead at the European Tour's South African Open yesterday.

Oosthuizen's faultless round included nine birdies and he leads from Zambian Madalitso Muthiya and last weekend's winner at the Mauritius Open, American Kurt Kitayama, who both carded eight-under-par rounds of 63.

Oosthuizen and Muthiya played on the shorter Bushwillow Course at the Randpark Golf Club, which saw most of the low scoring on Thursday, while Kitayama teed off on the more formidable Firethorn Course to put himself into an excellent position. Oosthuizen has never won his national Open championship before but is the highest-ranked player in this year's field and has some form after finishing in third place at the Nedbank Challenge last month.

Having turned at three under par, his superb approach to the 11th set up a second birdie in succession on the back nine, which turned into a hat-trick on the par-five 12th.

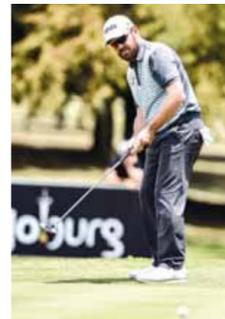
He managed further gains at 14, 16 and 17 for his lowest round on tour since the 2014 Alfred Dunhill Links Championship.

"My game's good, it's trending in the direction I want it to be," Oosthuizen told reporters earlier in the week.

"There's still a lot of work to be done to really be where I want it to be but I've been doing a lot of different things with my coach and just getting a feel for a few more things."

Muthiya had a contrasting round in which he landed five birdies in his first six holes, before slowing up on the back nine having turned in 29.

Kitayama also started with a birdie blitz in four of his first five holes and added an eagle on the par-five 14th, before finishing the 18th with another



Louis Oosthuizen in action during the first day of the South African Open in Johannesburg yesterday. (EPA)

shot gained to tie for second. The South African Open is the Golf's second oldest national championship having first been played in 1893, and this year has been combined with the Joburg Open into one event.

The highest finishing three non-exempt players this week will gain exemption for the Open Championship at Royal Portrush next July, with 2010 Open winner Oosthuizen already on the entry list.

LEADING 1ST ROUND SCORES

- 62-Louis Oosthuizen
- 63-Kurt Kitayama (USA), Madalitso Muthiya (ZAM)
- 64-Zander Lombard
- 65-Tyrone Ferreira, Matt Wallace (ENG), Mark Williams (ZIM)
- 66-Ernie Els, Branden Grace, David McIntyre, Jbe Kruger, Tom Murray (ENG), Jake Roos, Max Schmitt (GER), Marcel Siem (GER), Adilson da Silva (BRA)
- 67-Thomas Aiken, Dean Burmester, Pedro Figueredo (POR), Gregory Havret (FRA), Matthew Jordan (ENG), Stuart Manley (WAL), Anthony Michael, Jovan Rebula, Bernd Ritthammer (GER), Charl Schwartzel

SELECTED

- 69 - Justin Harding
- 70 - Shaun Norris, Chris Paisley (ENG)
- 71 - Brandon Stone
- 73 - Dylan Frittelli.

Stevenson remains 'critical' with brain injury - surgeon

Canadian boxer Adonis Stevenson remains in "critical condition" with a brain injury and it is premature to speculate about his long-term prognosis, his doctor said on Wednesday. Haiti-born Stevenson was knocked out in a WBC light heavyweight title fight in Quebec City on Saturday. His doctor at the Quebec University Hospital said the boxer had undergone surgery soon after being admitted. "He suffers from severe traumatic brain injury," Alexis Turgeon told reporters. "His situation is still stable under the circumstances, but critical." Stevenson was knocked out in the 11th round when his Ukrainian opponent Oleksandr Gvozdyk delivered a vicious combination to end the Canadian's unbeaten streak of 17 bouts. Stevenson slumped to the canvas and though he eventually got to his feet, doctors deemed his condition serious enough to send him to hospital. "His condition requires mechanical respiratory assistance, deep sedation and specialised neurological monitoring. It is too early to comment on Mr. Stevenson's long-term prognosis," Turgeon said. "It's a traumatic brain injury. The majority of people come out of it with after-effects."

FOCUS

Packers pick up pace for Falcons after McCarthy move

AFP
Monaco

When the schedule came out in the spring, Sunday's matchup between the Atlanta Falcons and Green Bay Packers had all the makings of a potential classic.

Two of the NFL's best teams. Two of the NFL's best quarterbacks. At an iconic venue in December. So much for that.

The Falcons (4-8) and Packers (4-7-1), who met in the NFC Championship game two years ago, are stumbling into Sunday's game at Lambeau Field.

The Packers have lost five of their last six games. Because of it, coach Mike McCarthy was fired after his team lost at home to the woeful Cardinals. Offensive coordinator Joe Philbin, who was fired four games into his fourth season as coach of the Dolphins in 2015, will serve as interim coach.

"I told the guys, we're looking for them to make progress, we're looking for them to improve," Philbin said. "We've got to clean up some areas and get better. I told them today again, I don't have the magic pill. I told the defense, we've got to get off blocks, we've got to cover people, we've got to pursue, we've got to get guys on the ground and tackle well. I told the offense, we've got to block, we've got to throw and catch, we've got to run hard with the ball. That's ultimately what wins games. Schemes are important but not as important as playing guys together and playing with great effort and playing fundamentally sound. That's really the focus."

The Falcons have lost their last four games.

Coach Dan Quinn's job appears safe after owner Arthur Blank gave him a ringing endorsement.

"Having a boss like him, you really want to get it right for him because of the support that he gives to me," Quinn said. "I definitely appreciate it. I wasn't looking for any of those things in that way, but I definitely appreciated it. And I recognized that the questions go with the territory when you fail more tests than you pass. Certainly these two teams who are strong and proud teams have had disappointing seasons up to this point."

Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan, the 2016 MVP, is having an excellent season. He's completed almost 71 percent of his passes with 25 touchdowns vs. five interceptions. But the Falcons have a feeble running game and a propensity to sleep walk through the third quarter. During their four-game losing streak, they're yet to score 20 points.

Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers, the 2011 and 2014 MVP, is 23 passes away from breaking Tom Brady's NFL-record streak of 358 consecutive passes without an interception. But he's completed only 61.8 percent of his passes. The Packers have been awful on third down all season, a major reason why they're only 16th in the league in scoring.

"I think everybody's kind of realizing that we're all under the microscope even more," Rodgers said. "Who knows what the changes are going to be after the season? So, there's the feeling that more eyes are on all of us, whether Mark (Murphy, the team president and CEO) or Brian (Gutkunst, the general manager) or scouts. I feel like the energy was good today. Unfortunately, the urgency that you need early in the season, we kind of had out in practice today."



Green Bay Packers' Aaron Rodgers gets up after being sacked by the Minnesota Vikings in the second half of the NFL game in Minneapolis, Minnesota. (EPA)

NFL

Ravens plan to put brakes on Mahomes, Chiefs' home streak

'Whoever scores the most wins the game. I don't know any more than that'



Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes passes the ball against the Arizona Cardinals in the first half of their NFL game at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City. (EPA)

Reuters
New York

A league-leading scoring average of 37 points provides a potential advantage for the Kansas City Chiefs where it matters most — the scoreboard.

Let Andy Reid elaborate. "It always comes down to, and don't slight the defense here, because that's important, but the thing is based on a points system," said the Chiefs coach, who needs one more win to tie Marty Schottenheimer (205) for seventh on the all-time NFL wins list.

"Whoever scores the most wins the game. I don't know any more than that. That's what

you try to do. It's pretty simple, right? I'll leave it at that."

The Baltimore Ravens (7-5) intend to do anything to complicate such simplicity. They rank first defensively in the NFL, allowing 281.7 yards and 17.8 points. The Ravens will visit Arrowhead Stadium on Sunday looking to end an eight-game home win streak for the Chiefs, who at 10-2 own the best record in the AFC.

The matchup looms as a difficult test for both Kansas City units.

Although Patrick Mahomes has been lights out as a first-year starter, the Chiefs quarterback figures to see a variety of blitzes from schemes the Ravens effectively disguise.

Defensively, the Chiefs have

struggled all season, allowing 33 points and 171 rushing yards last week to the woeful Oakland Raiders. Now, Kansas City faces a Baltimore offense that has won three straight with Lamar Jackson at quarterback, rushing for 716 yards over that span while controlling the clock an average of 37-plus minutes.

A stingy Baltimore defense, led by the likes of defensive end Terrell Suggs and linebacker C.J. Mosley, factors into the possession advantage.

Ravens coach John Harbaugh, however, realizes Mahomes presents a big-play threat with 43 passes of 25-plus yards and 41 touchdown strikes.

Those marks lead the NFL and incorporated the dynamic speed possessed by receivers such as

Tyreek Hill, as well as well as the creativity of Reid, a coach Harbaugh once worked under in Philadelphia.

"He's had coaches on his staff over the years that have specific areas of study," Harbaugh said. "They look at college football and probably high school football, knowing Andy, and he just does a great job of that."

Although the Chiefs released running back Kareem Hunt after a video was uncovered of an altercation last year's NFL rushing leader had with a woman, standouts still exist. In addition to Hill, Travis Kelce is an elite pass-catcher who leads NFL tight ends with 1,082 yards receiving.

"In reality, holding this team to what we did last (week) is

probably not going to happen," said Ravens safety Eric Weddle, referencing the 131 yards Baltimore allowed in beating Atlanta 26-16. "But we can make things tough on them. We can create turnovers. We can hold them in the red zone. So those things are areas that we can do, and if we do that, we'll be successful."

Although Jackson is expected to start at quarterback, the Ravens' Joe Flacco (hip) resumed activity at practice this week. Also, offensive tackle James Hurst could return from a nagging back injury.

Wide receiver Sammy Watkins returned to restricted practice reps for the Chiefs, who have still not used Eric Berry, though the veteran safety is participating in limited drills.

SPOTLIGHT

Mebane back with Chargers after family emergency

AFP
New York

Los Angeles Chargers nose tackle **Brandon Mebane** was back with the team for Wednesday's practice after missing two weeks to be with his infant daughter, who was born last month with a heart condition.

Mebane had been with his wife, Amana, and their two older children, Mahailey and Makai, in Omaha, Neb. while their newborn daughter, Makenna, has been receiving medical treatment. Makenna was born prematurely on Nov. 12 with a heart condition that will require surgery to compensate for a missing valve.

Mebane told reporters his daughter was born more than a month early and developed a stomach infection, which she is now recovering from. The surgery was pushed back a few months by the infection as Makenna continues to recover.

The parents learned of the heart condition in July and had been planning for the surgery, finding a hospital they preferred in Omaha. Amana and

the children have been living in Omaha throughout the season, and Mebane has flown from Los Angeles to Omaha early each week to see them before flying back on Tuesday nights.

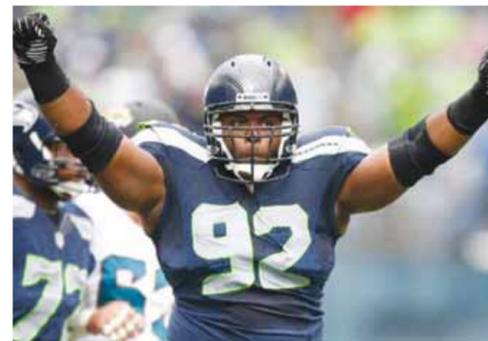
"It's been a long and hard, pretty tough year for me," Mebane said. "But I've been praying way more, keeping my faith and my older two kids."

The 33-year-old is one of two defensive captains in his third year with the Chargers and 12th in the NFL. He has 32 tackles (three for loss), one forced fumble, one sack and three QB hits in 10 games this season, missing wins over the Arizona Cardinals and Pittsburgh Steelers the past two weeks.

"He's back in practice and doing good," coach Anthony Lynn said of Mebane. "He's back with the team, and it's good to see Brandon."

"He's one of our leaders. He's a captain for a reason. On our team, these guys voted him that, and they've missed him. His leadership on the field is important, not just his ability. He's a good man."

The Chargers (9-3) host the Cincinnati Bengals (5-7) on Sunday.



Manfred aims to limit defensive shifts

Major League Baseball could be headed toward a shift regarding defensive shifts if commissioner Rob Manfred gets his way. Manfred, long a detractor of the increasingly popular defensive shifts, has "strong" support from MLB's competition committee to put some form of limit on the manoeuvres. The Athletic's Jayson Stark reported Wednesday. Shifts reportedly increased by 30 percent last season, and the majors' overall batting average of .248 marked the lowest level in 46 years. Batters also produced a .318 on-base percentage and a .409 slugging percentage. In 2017, the figures were .255/.324/.426. Any change to the playing

rules would need to be approved by the Major League Baseball Players Association, which currently holds no position on the issue, executive director Tony Clark said, according to ESPN. An unnamed front office executive told Stark regarding a rule to limit shifts, "I think it's a layup to get approved by the players." While shifts are far more common today, with analytics showing teams where they should place fielders to best defend against each hitter, the tactic goes back at least to the 1920s. Such notable batters as Ted Williams and Barry Bonds also were subjected to defensive shifts long before the current trend.

NBA

Curry leads Warriors past Cavaliers as Thunder roar back

'It just felt quiet, from what we're used to. For obvious reasons - it's not the same out there'

AFP
Los Angeles

Stephen Curry scored 42 points to lead the Golden State Warriors to a 129-105 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers on Wednesday in an NBA Finals rematch in name only.

Curry drained nine three-pointers and Kevin Durant added 25 points on nine of 16 shooting as the Warriors pulled away in the second half against a Cleveland team that bears little resemblance to the LeBron James-led Cavs that battled the Warriors in the last four championship series.

Curry, looking fully recovered in his third game back from a groin injury that sidelined him for 11 games, added nine rebounds and seven assists. Durant pulled down 10 rebounds and handed out nine assists. The Warriors were back in Cleveland for the first time since June, when they beat the Cavs to win their second straight NBA title and third in four years.

Since then the Cavs have seen James depart as a free agent to the Los Angeles Lakers. Forward JR Smith was also absent from the team, Kevin Love was nursing a foot injury and Kyle Korver was recently traded to Utah.

Tristan Thompson, one of the only holdovers from the Cavaliers teams that challenged the Warriors - and beat them for the crown in 2016 - scored 14 points with 19 rebounds. Rookie Collin Sexton led the Cavaliers with 21 points.

"It just felt quiet, from what we're used to," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said of the atmosphere in Cleveland. "For obvious reasons - it's not the same out there."

Despite Curry's 25 first-half points, Cleveland led at the break, closing the half on a 19-5 scoring run. "I thought they competed really hard," Kerr said of the Cavaliers. "First half, they knocked down shots, they controlled the whole half. Our talent took over in the second half."

The Warriors improved to 17-9 - still fourth in a Western Conference led by the Denver Nuggets, who edged the Orlando Magic 124-118 in overtime for a seventh straight victory that pushed their record to 17-7. They finished the night half a game in front of the Oklahoma City Thunder, who erased a 23-point deficit with less than five minutes to play to beat the Brooklyn Nets 114-112. "This is a special night," said Thunder forward Paul George, who scored 25 of his 47 points in the fourth quarter. "We came together when we were down - our backs against the wall. We showed who we are tonight."

George drained the game-winning three-pointer with three-seconds remaining, taking a feed from Russell Westbrook who drew two defenders then passed to George on the perimeter. Westbrook finished with 21 points, 17 assists and 15 rebounds, his 108th career triple-



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry drives to the basket against Cleveland Cavaliers. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

double moving him past Jason Kidd for third place on the NBA's all-time list.

Only Oscar Robertson with 181 and Magic Johnson with 138 have achieved more triple-doubles - reaching double digits in three key statistical categories.

The Los Angeles Clippers, who came into the night tied for the lead in the West, fell a game behind the Nuggets with a 96-86 loss to the Memphis Grizzlies. Memphis avenged their overtime loss to the Clippers less than two weeks ago, holding Los Angeles to their lowest points total of the season. Center Joakim Noah, signed by the Grizzlies on Tuesday, made his first NBA appearance in 11 months, scor-

ing four points in 13 minutes on the floor. In Los Angeles, LeBron James scored 20 of his 42 points in the fourth quarter as the Lakers beat the San Antonio Spurs 121-113. In Toronto, Kawhi Leonard scored 36 points and Jonas Valanciunas added 18 of his 26 in the fourth quarter as the Raptors defeated the Philadelphia 76ers 113-102.

The Raptors rebounded from a loss to Denver on Monday to improve their league-leading record to 21-5. Leonard connected on 13 of 24 shots from the field, including five of six from three-point range as the Raptors withstood a 38-point performance from Philadelphia's Jimmy Butler.

RESULTS

Toronto	113-102	Philadelphia
Lakers	121-113	San Antonio
Atlanta	117-131	Washington
Brooklyn	112-114	Oklahoma City
Memphis	96-86	Clippers
Milwaukee	115-92	Detroit
Minnesota	121-104	Charlotte
New Orleans	132-106	Dallas
Cleveland	105-129	Golden State
Orlando	118-124	Denver

SPOTLIGHT

Durant: Owing team in Seattle would be 'great story'

Reuters
New York

Kevin Durant, Seattle NBA owner? No, the NBA still does not have a franchise in the city that once had the SuperSonics, and the then-up-and-coming Durant, as its own.

However, after his Golden State Warriors beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 129-105 on Wednesday night, Durant told ESPN that not only would he love to own a team one day, but that doing so in Seattle would be a "great story."

"Of course I would. No matter if it's Seattle or any team, just to help young men grow," Durant said about the idea of owning an NBA franchise. "Or help men in the next phase of their lives as basketball players. Why not? Especially somebody who's gone through it and been through just about everything as an NBA player, outside of getting traded, I've been through pretty much everything."

"I would love to give back to an organisation, the knowledge that I've gained. So hell yeah I'd be interested."

Durant, 30, played his rookie season in Seattle after being chosen with the No. 2 overall pick in the 2007 NBA Draft. The next year he was lacing up

his sneakers in the inaugural season for the Oklahoma City Thunder after the franchise moved.

The four-time league scoring champion wore a Shawn Kemp jersey and made an impassioned speech to Seattle fans when his Warriors played a preseason game in Seattle in October. With the city recently being awarded an NHL team, the topic of an NBA return to the city made its way to Durant.

On Wednesday, he said he would welcome a role in helping bring basketball back to the city that drafted him.

"It's just the fact that I played there and I get so much love there," Durant said to ESPN. "More than any city in the league probably. Look, it would be a great story. But it would be a lot of hard work, it won't be easy because it's Seattle. After the press release and the first couple of weeks, it's straight to work."

"I know people want to tie me into Seattle a lot, and I love being part of that, but I'm not just waiting for that opportunity. Any opportunity that comes around where I could become (part of) an ownership group or a front office or anywhere I could just help the team as of right now in my life, I would go for it, but who knows what will happen at the end of my career?"



Golden State Warriors' Kevin Durant.

NHL

Streaking Ducks dump slumping Blackhawks

Reuters
Anaheim

Ondrej Kase scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period as the Anaheim Ducks opened a four-game homestand with a 4-2 victory against the Chicago Blackhawks on Wednesday night.

Brandon Montour, Daniel Sprong and Jakob Silfverberg also scored for the Ducks, who won their fifth consecutive game and improved to 7-1-2 over their past 10. Goal-tender John Gibson made 25 saves.

Erik Gustafsson and Alex DeBrincat scored for the Blackhawks, who have lost five in a row and dropped to 3-9-2 under coach Jeremy Colliton after he replaced the fired Joel Quenneville. Corey Crawford stopped 28 shots. Kase broke a 2-2 tie at 4:03 of the third period, taking a long, cross-ice stretch pass from Carter Rowney to break down the right wing. Kase fired a shot over Crawford's left shoulder from the right faceoff dot.

Silfverberg scored an empty-net goal at 18:29 to cap the victory. The Blackhawks had opportunities, hitting the post four times. Chicago's league-worst power play went 0-for-3. After trailing 2-0 following the first period, the Blackhawks tied it at 2-2 in the second. Gustafsson got the Blackhawks on the board at 7:16 of the period. Patrick Kane drove the puck along the boards below the goal line before shovelling a pass to Duncan Keith near the top of the left faceoff circle.

RESULTS

Edmonton	3-2	St. Louis
Anaheim	4-2	Chicago
San Jose	5-1	Carolina

Keith faked a shot and passed to Gustafsson, whose one-timer from the right faceoff dot beat Gibson to the near post.

Chicago tied it at 19:32 of the second, as DeBrincat took a pass from Jonathan Toews and batted the puck just inside the left post from close range. Montour and Sprong scored 20 seconds apart early in the first period to give the Ducks a 2-0 lead.

Montour put Anaheim on top at 5:41, floating the puck toward the net from the point. The shot found the upper left corner of the net as Crawford was screened by Rickard Rakell. Sprong made it 2-0 at 6:01, taking a banked pass off the boards from Adam Henrique down the right wing.

Sprong, playing in his first game for the Ducks after being acquired Monday in a trade with Pittsburgh, nearly reached the goal line before firing a sharp-angle shot that made its way over Crawford's shoulder and into the far upper corner of the net. It was Sprong's first goal in 17 games overall this season.

MEIER, THORNTON GUIDE SHARKS PAST HURRICANES

Timo Meier collected one goal and two assists, and Joe Thornton notched three assists as the San Jose Sharks thumped the visit-

ing Carolina Hurricanes 5-1 on Wednesday night. Goalie Martin Jones made 39 saves for the Sharks, who have won two in a row.

San Jose's Barclay Goodrow opened the scoring at 3:44 of the first period with a snipe that isn't often seen from a fourth-line player. After Melker Karlsson stole the puck in the offensive zone, Kevin Labanc made a quick pass to Goodrow, who snapped a shot into the net for his fourth goal of the season.

Tomas Hertl doubled the Sharks' lead just past the midway point of the opening frame with an easy tally set up by Labanc. With San Jose on the power play, Labanc fired a perfect pass to Hertl at the doorstep, and he simply redirected the puck for his seventh of the season. The goal snapped Carolina's penalty-kill run at 21 successful kills, a stretch that lasted more than seven games.

Meier's goal at 8:42 of the second period made it a 3-0. Meier was in the slot when he deflected Radim Simek's shot into the cage for his 14th goal of the season.

The assist was Simek's first NHL point. The rout was on when Joe Pavelski scored at 15:02 of the second period with a lucky goal.

Even though no teammates were in the vicinity, Pavelski sent the puck to the front of the net and Carolina's Jordan Staal inadvertently deflected the puck into his own cage. It was Pavelski's fifth goal in as many games and 18th of the season. Carolina's Lucas Wallmark scored with 89 seconds left in the second period, but San Jose's Marcus Sorensen rounded out the scoring with just over four minutes left in the game.



Anaheim Ducks players celebrate the 4-2 victory over Chicago Blackhawks. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

LIGUE 1

Cavani rescues PSG in Strasbourg stalemate

Uruguayan striker fires home a 71st-minute penalty to maintain PSG's unbeaten record

AFP
Paris

Edinson Cavani saved a point for Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday night as the Ligue 1 leaders slipped for the second time in a week with a hugely entertaining 1-1 draw at Strasbourg. The Uruguayan striker fired home a 71st-minute penalty to maintain PSG's unbeaten record after 16 games despite a disjointed performance without injured star attacker Neymar, equalising Kenny Lala's own spot-kick four minutes before the break for the spirited hosts, who came close to inflicting their opponents first league defeat of the season.

"If you arrive in flip flops against PSG, you go home with a good spanking," said Strasbourg coach Thierry Laurey. "We suffered at times but we managed to minimise their offensive power. They dominated the play but we were never in too much danger."

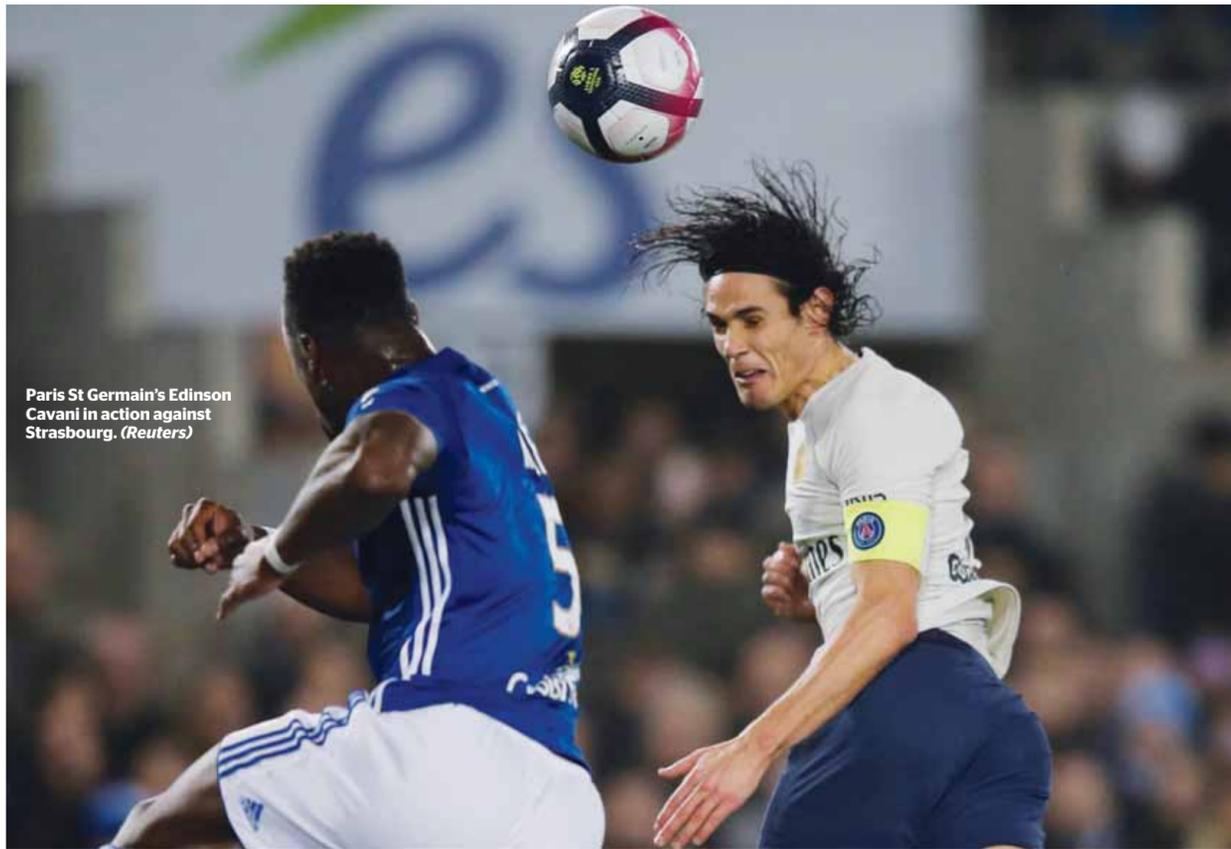
Thomas Tuchel's side, who also drew at Bordeaux at the weekend and started without Kylian Mbappe and Thiago Silva, remain way ahead of the rest after a night in France full of late goals, incident and VAR.

Champions PSG are 14 points ahead of Lille, who moved second on Tuesday after beating Montpellier 1-0 and stayed there thanks to Hatem Ben Arfa and Jordan Siebatcheu leading Rennes to a 2-0 win at Lyon on Wednesday. Bruno Genesio's Lyon are fourth, 15 points behind PSG, while inconsistent Marseille are a further two points back after a 3-2 defeat at Nantes.

PSG now don't play until they travel to Serbia for their Champions League clash at Red Star Belgrade, where a win will ensure their progress to the last 16, after tomorrow's match with Montpellier was postponed because of security concerns.

"We reacted and showed a lot of quality in the second half. We completely controlled play in the opposing half and had both a lot of possession and dangerous situations," said Tuchel. "We played very well in the second half, showed quality but could not score."

The video assistant referees were involved in a series of key decisions on Wednesday, and it was VAR that helped



Paris St Germain's Edinson Cavani in action against Strasbourg. (Reuters)

Strasbourg take the lead over PSG, with referee Antony Gautier awarding Lala's spot kick a full four minutes after Thilo Kehrer handled Lionel Carole's fizzing cross. The half-time deficit led Tuchel to bring Mbappe off the bench, and it was France's World Cup star who won the penalty that Cavani blasted past Matz Sels, Lala hacking the 19-year-old superstar down in the box.

PSG looked a different proposition to the sluggish team that slogged through the opening period, and Kehrer thought he had made amends for giving away

the opening penalty six minutes after the break, only to see his header saved at point-blank range by Sels. However as the half wore on the away side ran out of ideas and Strasbourg made a push for the win in the final minutes.

Substitute Adrien Thomasson forced a superb stop from Alphonse Areola with a minute left, and the 24-year-old thought he had snatched a famous win deep in injury time when he headed home Youssouf Fofana's pinpoint cross. However while the majority of the crowd celebrated wildly, the lines-

man's flag was rightly raised to rule the unfortunate Thomasson's goal out for offside. Chief among the other crucial decisions helped by VAR on a dramatic night was Loick Landre's 96th-minute winner for Nimes at Caen, which came after Prince Oniangue had levelled at 1-1 in the 90th minute and was eventually given after Landre was found to be on-side.

VAR also came to Bordeaux's assistance by awarding the penalty slotted home by Francois Kamano as they followed up on drawing with PSG at the

weekend with a last gasp 3-2 win over Champions League-chasing Saint-Etienne at the Matmut Atlantique.

Pablo bagged the points in the final minute, and Bordeaux's opening goal came at a cost to Neven Subotic, who was stretched off with blood pouring down his face after being clattered by his own goalkeeper Stephane Ruffier just before Jimmy Briand scuffed in.

Dijon sank rock-bottom Guingamp further into the relegation mire thanks to Oussama Haddadi scoring four minutes in time to hand the hosts a 2-1 win.

SPOTLIGHT

Henry, Vieira clash postponed

AFP
Paris

Two more Ligue 1 games scheduled for this weekend, including the clash between Thierry Henry's Monaco and local rivals Nice, have been postponed, the French league (LFP) said yesterday, amid fears of more violent "yellow vest" protests in France over rising living costs.

The LFP said today evening's game at the Stade Louis II had been called off following a request by the government in the Mediterranean principality, "in collaboration" with authorities in the neighbouring French Alpes-Maritimes prefecture, which includes Nice. Sunday night's encounter between Saint-Etienne and Marseille has also been postponed on the request of local authorities. The latest postponements come after Paris Saint-Germain's game against Montpellier and Lyon's trip to Toulouse – scheduled for tomorrow – were both called off due to security concerns, and the possibility remains that all other French top-flight games could be postponed too.

Paris has been the scene of violent protests for three weekends running from "yellow vest" demonstrators unhappy at planned fuel tax rises. Demonstrations turned particularly violent last Saturday, with 412 people arrested after the worst clashes in central Paris for decades. However, unrest has also spread across the country, turning into a broader challenge to President Emmanuel Macron's agenda and complaints that he is out of touch with the struggles of ordinary people.

A new round of protests is expected this weekend. The Cote d'Azur derby was due to see Monaco take on a Nice side coached by Patrick Vieira, Henry's former teammate at Arsenal and the French national side.

Henry oversaw just his second win in 10 games in charge of struggling Monaco as they beat Amiens 2-0 away on Tuesday with a brace of penalties by Radamel Falcao, but the 2017 champions remain in the bottom three. Dijon sank rock-bottom Guingamp further into the relegation mire with a 2-1 win.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Ralph Hasenhuettl: the 'Alpine Klopp' who admits he is a little bit crazy

By Ed Aarons
The Guardian

Ever since Ralph Hasenhuettl made his debut as a gangly teenage striker for his hometown club Grazer, Southampton's new manager has forged a career out of being patient. The first Austrian to take charge of a Premier League club was signed by Austria Vienna in 1988 as a replacement for Toni Polster, who had been sold to Torino the previous season for £1.2m, and he went on to win three successive titles and earn an international call-up.

But nagging injuries and the presence of poster boy and part-time pop star Polster meant Hasenhuettl, despite scoring three goals in eight appearances for his country, missed out on selection for the 1990 World Cup and again in 1998, winding down his playing career in Germany, where he lived for two decades until his move to Southampton was confirmed on Wednesday.

"He talks more like a German these days than an Austrian," says Andreas Heidenreich from the Kurier newspaper. "But it's very good for the country to have our first Premier League manager. He's very popular in Austria, which is a small country in world football, so people are very proud to see him move to England. He's a very down-to-earth and that is the same style as he was when he was a player. He was never fancy – he was very good in the air but had limited chances because he was playing in the same era as Polster."

After playing for Bayern Munich's reserve side at the end of his career, it was in Bavaria that he was handed a first opportunity in coaching, taking over the youth team at third-tier Unterhaching in 2004 before being promoted to the first team three years later.

Hasenhuettl was sacked in 2010 and joined VfR Aalen, where he began to develop a gegenpressing style that has brought comparisons to Jürgen Klopp. Both were born in the summer of 1967



Ralph Hasenhuettl's appointment as Southampton's manager is a source of pride in his native Austria.

and they went on the same course to earn their coaching badges, yet whereas Liverpool's manager was handed his chance by Mainz after retiring in 2001, the "Alpine Klopp" had to do it the hard way.

Having taken Aalen to the 2. Bundesliga for the first time, he moved to Ingolstadt in October 2013 and transformed a team threatened with relegation into champions the following season. He left after a successful Bundesliga campaign in which the tiny club finished 11th, taking up the challenge of guiding nouveau riche RB Leipzig through their first season in Germany's top-flight.

RB Leipzig broke the record for the longest undefeated streak of a promoted team as they finished runners-up to Bayern and qualified for the Champions League but Hasenhuettl's time in eastern Germany was brought to a sudden halt in the summer when he failed to repeat the trick, with the sporting director, Ralf Rangnick, stepping into his shoes while they await the arrival of Julian Nagels-

mann. "I think he also wanted to take the next step – it's very hard to keep Leipzig in the Champions League every season," says Heidenreich. "It's also not so easy to work with Ralf Rangnick ..."

With Hasenhuettl having spent two weeks on trial at Chelsea under Glenn Hoddle in the mid-1990s, there was always a sense that the Premier League could be his next destination. "I didn't really believe that I could sign there but it was fantastic inspiration for my career that I could train there for two weeks," he said in an interview in 2015. "My talent in playing football was not the highest but I was very hard-working, interested to learn and get better, and this focus made me better and better."

He has certainly applied that approach to management, spending the summer after he left Aalen riding between Borussia Dortmund's and Borussia Mönchengladbach's training camps on his mountain bike and spying on their sessions with a pair of binoculars. "It's better to be in-

cognito because otherwise everyone is talking to you because they know you – and you can't concentrate on the training because everyone is talking to you," he explained. "I was also in Italy when Germany were preparing for the World Cup because it was interesting for me. I'm maybe in this way a little bit crazy but it made me a better coach."

Hasenhuettl, a talented piano player, will need to press all the right notes if Southampton are to recover from an awful period that has brought only one home win in the Premier League since November 2017. But if anyone can do it, then it is surely the manager who became known in Germany for his exuberant celebrations.

"He expects players to work very hard and is very demanding but is a very positive guy who brings a good atmosphere to his teams," says Heidenreich. "After the matches, he often cannot sleep and has said that he sometimes stays up all night watching replays." There may be a few sleepless nights to come.

FOCUS

Vietnam vs Malaysia in Suzuki Cup final

AFP
Hanoi

Vietnam joined Malaysia in the final of the 2018 AFF Suzuki Cup after a 2-1 second leg victory over the Philippines in Hanoi yesterday gave them a 4-2 aggregate win in their semi-final.

Two late goals from Nguyen Quang Hai and Nguyen Cong Phuong were enough to send Vietnam, 2-1 ahead from the first leg on Sunday, to their first final of the Southeast Asian biennial tournament since winning the trophy in 2008. Under former England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson, the Philippines rarely looked like overturning the deficit from the first leg and fell at the semifinal stage for the fourth time in the last five editions.

In front of 40,000 fans in Ha-

noi, Vietnam made most of the running and had most of the chances but were unable to add to the two goals scored in the first leg until seven minutes from time. After the two strikes in quick succession, James Younghusband pulled a goal back for the Philippines with a minute remaining.

Vietnam, led by South Korean coach Park Hang-seo, will be favourites to become regional champions for the second time although Malaysia pulled off a surprise result and eliminated defending champions Thailand in Bangkok on Wednesday.

The two teams met in the group stage in November with Vietnam defeating Malaysia 2-0 in Hanoi. The first leg of the final will take place in Kuala Lumpur on December 11 with the return match scheduled for Hanoi four days later.

COPA HOLDERS BARCA, ATLETICO INTO LAST 16

Barcelona: Holders Barcelona and Atletico Madrid breezed into the Copa del Rey last 16 after wide margin wins on Wednesday night. Spanish international Denis Suarez bagged a double as Barca beat third-tier Leonesa 4-1 to progress 5-1 on aggregate.

Atletico were too strong for Sant Andreu, brushing aside the fourth division minnows 4-0 for a 5-0 aggregate win. It was a red letter evening for Villarreal's Cameroon striker Karl Toko-Ekambi, who scored a four times in his side's 8-0 thumping of Almeria, after a

first leg that ended all square at 3-3.

Another La Liga outfit Sevilla also went through to join Valencia and Espanyol, who assured their progress on Tuesday. Late last night, Real Madrid were hosting Melilla, their third-division visitors from North Africa who have a mammoth task of overturning a 4-0 first leg loss in what was coach Santiago Solari's first game in charge for the European champions.

Other top flight clubs in action were Levante, Eibar, Athletic Bilbao and Real Betis.



PREMIER LEAGUE

Man United battle to draw with Arsenal, Liverpool march on

Spurs up to third after 3-1 win over Southampton; Chelsea lose 2-1 at Wolves

Reuters
London

Manchester United remain distant spectators in a Premier League title race in which Liverpool continue to chase Manchester City but showed plenty of spirit as they twice equalised in a 2-2 draw with in-form Arsenal at Old Trafford yesterday.

Liverpool also fell behind but stormed back to beat Burnley 3-1 and cut the gap on leaders Manchester City to two points. Tottenham Hotspur climbed to third with a 3-1 win over Southampton while Chelsea hung on to fourth spot, above Arsenal on goal difference, despite a 2-1 defeat at Wolverhampton Wanderers who ended a run of six games without a win.

Storm clouds have been gathering over Jose Mourinho's misfiring United side and on a wet night in the north west they again looked well short of being contenders for the top four. It was the first United vs Arsenal clash since 1986 not featuring either Alex Ferguson or Arsene Wenger in the dugout.

On this occasion it was Wenger's successor Unai Emery who would had more to be satisfied as his Arsenal side stretched their unbeaten run to 20 matches — although United boss Jose Mourinho also took comfort from a result that left his side 18 points behind leaders Manchester City.

"This is a performance of big soul and heart," Mourinho said. "But even from our bench you could feel the little panic when the ball comes to our defensive third."

Mourinho, who left Paul Pogba and Romelu Lukaku out of his starting line-up, said his side "scored all four goals". He got to have expected keeper David de Gea to suffer the sort of panic that keeps undermining his side. De Gea should have comfortably held Shkodran Mustafi's 26th-minute downward header but merely juggled it over his head and over the line. Anthony Martial levelled six minutes later from close range, Ander Herrera pulling the ball back after Marcos Rojo's free kick was well-saved by Bernd Leno.

Rojo forced Leno into a fine save but it was Arsenal who led again in the 68th minute when Alexandre Lacazette got the final touch but the advantage lasted less than a minute as Arse-



Arsenal's Alexandre Lacazette scores against Manchester United during the Premier League match in Manchester on Wednesday night. (Reuters)

nal's defence allowed Jesse Lingard to steal in and slide a shot under Leno.

De Gea made crucial late saves to deny Arsenal a first league win at Old Trafford since 2006. "I think we controlled the game, the second half better than the first," Emery said. "We could have won this match in certain moments, but they equalised very quickly after both our goals."

After Manchester City beat Watford on Tuesday to go five points clear, Liverpool responded well as their best start to a top-flight season contin-

ued after falling behind at Turf Moor. James Milner levelled for the Reds after Jack Cork's surprise opener and substitute Roberto Firmino set Liverpool on course for a 12th win in 15 league games with his first touch before Xherdan Shaqiri rounded things off. "I was really happy we could just adjust a few tactical things (at half-time)," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said after his side's 12th in 15 games. "I shouted a lot in the first half but I wasn't angry."

His only concern was a nasty-

looking ankle injury sustained by Joe Gomez in the first half. Tottenham Hotspur shook off their north London derby defeat by Arsenal with Harry Kane, Lucas Moura and Son Heung-min all on target for Mauricio Pochettino's side at Wembley where new Southampton manager Ralph Hasenhuttl watched from the stands.

Tottenham have 33 points, six behind Liverpool, and two more than Chelsea and Arsenal. Chelsea took the lead early through Ruben Loftus-Cheek but Wolves replied with quick-

fire goals by Raul Jimenez and Diogo Jota as Chelsea lost for the second time in three games.

"We played very well for 55 minutes and then suddenly we were another team," Chelsea manager Maurizio Sarri said. Fulham manager Claudio Ranieri welcomed his old club Leicester City to Craven Cottage and shared the spoils in a 1-1 draw while Everton were held 1-1 at home by Newcastle United.

Southampton, Burnley and Fulham occupy the three relegation spots with nine points each.

Koscielny nears Arsenal return from Achilles injury

Arsenal could be bolstered by the return of club captain Laurent Koscielny for the busy festive period after seven months out due to a ruptured Achilles tendon. Koscielny missed out on France's World Cup victory in Russia and is yet to feature for new Arsenal boss Unai Emery. The 33-year-old defender limped out of the Checkatrade Trophy clash at Portsmouth on Tuesday night, but Arsenal under-23 coach Freddie Ljungberg confirmed that was just due to cramp. Koscielny could even be in contention for selection against Huddersfield in the Premier League tomorrow. "Laurent Koscielny continued his rehabilitation on Tuesday with an appearance for our Under-21s in a Checkatrade Trophy game at Portsmouth," said a statement.

Pavard keeps mum amid Bayern, Liverpool rumours

World Cup winner Benjamin Pavard said playing Champions League football remains the priority as he mulls leaving his beloved Germany or pushing through a move to Bundesliga giants Bayern Munich. Pavard's status skyrocketed in the summer when he scored a superb goal in a 4-3 last-16 win over Argentina that set France on their way to World Cup glory in Russia. The 22-year-old defender has been at VfB Stuttgart since 2016 but seems unlikely to remain at the struggling side beyond this season, with a big-money move to Bayern among other "concrete offers" on the table. "I haven't made promises to any clubs," Pavard said. "Maybe I will go (to Bayern) but I don't know what the future has in store for me."

Leicester crash helicopter rotor pedals failed: Probe

Disconnected cockpit pedals caused the helicopter crashed that killed the Thai billionaire owner of Leicester City football club and four others on October 28, a British investigation found. The death of Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha shocked global sport and left the small city in the heart of England in mourning two years after their improbable first and only championship season. The helicopter, decorated the blue and white colours of the team, spun out of control on takeoff moments after it cleared the stadium's roof. Vichai attended most Leicester home matches, landing and taking off from the centre of the pitch.

Peru football chief Oviedo arrested in graft probe

Police arrested Peru's Football Federation chief Edwin Oviedo on suspicion of involvement in a "corruption network" involving judges and businessmen, a prosecutor said. Oviedo was detained in an early morning raid on his home in Lima, and other arrests were likely, said prosecutor Jorge Chavez, coordinator of Lima's organized crime unit. "There is an order to search several homes," Chavez said. Oviedo, 47, is being held for a "preliminary" 10-day period. Meanwhile, a court in Lima is expected to rule soon on a prosecution request to jail him for 24 months in a separate case in which he is accused of ordering the murders of two trade unionists at a sugar company he controlled.

SPOTLIGHT

Sarri questions Chelsea players' attitude after Wolves defeat



Chelsea players react after 2-1 defeat against Wolves on Wednesday night. (Reuters)

By Stuart James
The Guardian

Maurizio Sarri questioned the attitude of his Chelsea players and accused some of over-confidence after they suffered a chastening 2-1 defeat at Wolves that leaves them 10 points behind Manchester City, the Premier League leaders, before tomorrow's meeting between the two clubs at Stamford Bridge.

After taking the lead through Ruben Loftus-Cheek, Chelsea conceded twice in four second-half minutes, with Sarri dismayed at the way his players reacted to Raül Jiménez's equaliser. The Italian admitted he was "really worried" by what he had

seen thereafter as Wolves turned the game on its head through Diogo Jota's winner.

"I think we played very well for 55 minutes," Sarri said. "After the first [Wolves] goal — that was an accident because we were in full control of the match — we were suddenly another team, without the right distances, without our football. I don't know why. I am really worried not for the result but for the fact that we didn't react to the first goal of the opponent."

Sarri made five changes to his starting XI but said that neither his team selection nor a couple of controversial refereeing decisions — Álvaro Morata had a strong penalty appeal turned down and Willian felt he was fouled prior to Wolves scoring their second — came into his

thinking when he analysed Chelsea's performance.

"I think it's more important to talk about our attitude after the first goal," he said.

"We were not the same team as before. So I don't want to discuss if there was a foul on Willian or not. It's not important for me. Maybe it was for the result, but not for me. I have to understand why the team was suddenly another team."

Sarri said taking on Pep Guardiola's side is now a daunting prospect. "For me, City is the best team in Europe and maybe in the world. So the match is difficult for this reason. Of course, after this match, we lost confidence, but maybe it's better because sometimes my players show me that they have too much confidence."

FOCUS

West Ham's Arnautovic out for a month

Reuters
London

West Ham striker Marko Arnautovic has been ruled out for a month after pulling a hamstring in Tuesday's 3-1 Premier League win over Cardiff City, manager Manuel Pellegrini said yesterday.

The Austria international has emerged as a key player at the tip of West Ham's attack this season with five league goals in 13 games and Pellegrini said the club's other forwards had to step up during a busy run of fixtures this month. "Arnautovic has a muscle injury. He'll probably be out for around one month," Pellegrini told a news conference ahead of tomorrow's game against Crystal Palace. "We know how important he is for this team. We know we have to play seven



games in December and six games more in January."

Midfielder Jack Wilshere will also miss Saturday's game at the London Stadium

with an ankle injury. "Wilshere is not 100% comfortable so he won't be available, but it will just be for this game," Pellegrini added. "We have a squad and now is the time for other players to take their chance."

Lucas Perez, who replaced Arnautovic against Cardiff, scored his first two goals for the club and Pellegrini was confident the Spaniard could lead the line. "I'm pleased because he's a player I brought in this season to this team," the Chilean said of the former Arsenal striker.

"We know he's a good striker and the important thing is, when he has a chance, he takes it. With Marko's injury, we have Lucas in this position... We have Andy Carroll too. We hope he will play games in a row now."

West Ham, who will be seeking a third straight win, are 13th in the table with 18 points, two places but six points above visitors Palace.

IVORIAN FURY AFTER CAMEROON MOOTED AS 2021 CUP OF NATIONS HOSTS

Abidjan: Ivory Coast has reacted angrily to the possibility that they could be replaced as 2021 Africa Cup of Nations hosts by Cameroon. After ditching Cameroon last week as 2019 hosts due to delays with preparations and security concerns, CAF president Ahmad Ahmad said on Monday that African football's governing body could "give Cameroon more time" and allow them to stage the 2021 edition instead.

That would trigger a domino effect with original hosts the Ivory Coast dropping back to 2023 in place of Guinea, a scenario that has angered the Ivorian Football Federation. "No Ivorian state authority, nor any leader of the federation, has been contacted or approached by CAF," the federation

said, adding that a letter had been sent to the African body on Tuesday.

Countries struggling to meet deadlines for the building of stadiums, roads, medical facilities and other infrastructure has been a Cup of Nations problem for decades. Hosts Gabon were applying finishing touches to one stadium after the 2017 Cup of Nations kicked off. From 2019, the competition will be played during the June and July instead of January and February to avoid the club-versus-country clashes that have marred recent editions.

Cameroon won the 2017 tournament despite a number of their stars, including Liverpool defender Joel Matip, opting to stay at their clubs in the middle of the

European season.

The Cup of Nations finals, which began as a three-team event in Sudan in 1957, will expand to 24 countries from next year, up from the 16-team format used since 1998.

This means that hosts need six venues instead of four, putting an extra strain on the finances and resources of governments, who bankroll the tournament.

Morocco are considered favourites to replace Cameroon as 2019 hosts with South Africa — emergency hosts in 1996 and 2013 — another possibility.

Egypt have said they would not compete with another Arab country for the right to stage the 2019 edition of a tournament they have won a record seven times.

QNB STARS LEAGUE

Leaders Duhail look to get back to winning ways

Al Sadd are away at Al Arabi stadium to face Al Shahania



Al Duhail players train yesterday on the eve of their QNB Stars League match against Qatar SC.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Duhail will be hoping to get back to winning ways, when the leaders take on Qatar SC in the QNB Stars League today. Duhail were held to a 2-2 draw by Al Rayyan last week but still lead the table with 35 points, three more than second-placed Al Sadd. The Red Knights, who have a game in hand (against Al Sadd rescheduled from Week 9 due to AFC Champions League commitment), have the most number of victories to their credit.

Duhail are the only unbeaten side in the 12-team competition. Interestingly, they were held goalless by Al Rayyan in the first leg and those were the only occasions where they dropped points. Sadd had cut Al Duhail's lead on top from five to three points after the Week 14 action, so the latter will be keen to win in order to remain as strong contenders for the title.

Ahead of the game, Al Duhail coach Nabil Maaloul said nothing less than a victory will satisfy his team. "There was only a short

period between our game against Al Rayyan and Qatar SC. Certainly, the confrontation will not be easy, especially as Qatar SC were able to give us a tough fight in the first leg," Maaloul said.

"Youngsters are playing big games despite the numerical shortage. I am happy with the performance they showed in the game against Al Rayyan. I believe that the team was able to put up its best display and we must continue with the same discipline," he added.

Meanwhile, Qatar SC brought Al Saliya's good run to an end by scoring a 1-0 victory over them in the last round. Qatar SC are placed 10th with 14 points as last week's win over Saliya helped them stay clear of the danger zone.

Meanwhile, Al Sadd will in action later in the night as they are away at Al Arabi stadium to face Al Shahania. The Wolves have the most number of wins, after Duhail and would like to keep the pace with their fierce rivals before the much-anticipated clash between the two.

Al Sadd coach Jesualdo Ferreira said his team will not take Shahania lightly. "Everyone knows that

we will face a team that is weaker than us on paper, but they have proved to be a strong team and can make surprises. This match comes before our most important game against Al Duhail, the rescheduled game from the ninth week," said Ferreira.

"Al Sadd are a big team. We are determined to keep winning, we need to win to make ourselves strong contenders for the title. We are ready to face Al Shahania. Our players are professional. They are strong mentally too and I do not think that they will be preoccupied with the Al Duhail match when they take on Al Shahania. Xavi (Hernandez) is ready and may play against Al Shahania as he has recovered from his injury," added Ferreira.

Al Shahania will look to collect as many points as possible even though they are somewhat safe from the relegation threat. The promoted side has been doing well under Spanish coach Jose Murcia.

Murcia said nothing is impossible in football as he aimed for a shock win over Sadd. "We know the difficulty of facing Al Sadd, one of the best teams around. They are coming from a great

victory, but we have trust in our players. We will make every effort to get points," he said.

"Nothing is impossible in football, we always play for victory and we will play against Al Sadd with the aim of collecting three points. As I said, we respect Al Sadd as a team. We are an ambitious team and want to create our own history. We will play with all our strength and that gives us great confidence. I expect the game to be difficult. Victory will further boost our confidence," Murcia added.

"We are staying confident although Al Sadd have a large group of outstanding players. We will not surrender meekly. We do not think about losing or our opponents, but we have to think about our team. If we want to win, we have to play with the ambition to win and our team is better today than before," said Murcia.

FIXTURES

Today: Al Duhail vs Qatar SC at 4pm. Al Shahania vs Al Sadd at 6:30pm.

Tomorrow: Al Khor vs Al Saliya at 4pm; Umm Salal vs Al Arabi at 6:30pm

Quinn rides Khataaf to Al Safliya Cup win



Jimmy Quinn (left) rides Khataaf To victory in the Al Safliya Cup at the Al Rayyan Park yesterday.



QREC Racing manager Abdullah Rashid al-Kubaisi (fourth from right) poses with the winners of the Al Safliya Cup after Ibrahim al-Malki's Khataaf won the 2400m race at the Al Rayyan Park yesterday. PICTURES: Juhaim

SPOTLIGHT

Libertadores final in Madrid no handicap for River: Tevez

AFP
Madrid

Boca Juniors striker Carlos Tevez conceded playing a Libertadores Cup final in Madrid on Sunday will be "weird" but rejected suggestions River Plate have been put at a disadvantage. The second leg was moved to Real Madrid's Santiago Bernabeu after the original fixture at River's El Monumental stadium was postponed last month, following an attack by their fans on Boca's team bus.

South America's football federation, CONMEBOL, ruled River should lose the chance to play at home, with the game moved abroad amid fears over further fan violence. "It is a weird final," Tevez said yesterday after Boca had trained for the first time at Las Rozas, the base of the Spanish national team. "To play a match between Boca and River in Madrid, it's weird. But as a player, it is important to stay focused on the match."

Argentina's two greatest football rivals competing for South America's most prestigious club prize out of the country, and in Spain, has proven controversial, with both clubs expressing their disapproval. Boca believe the chaos caused by River's fans means they should be awarded the trophy while River have protested against the loss of home advantage enjoyed by their opponents in the first leg, which finished 2-2.

Both sets of supporters have been allowed an equal allocation of 25,000 tickets for the match in Madrid, despite away fans being banned at Boca's



Bombonera ground, as they would have been at El Monumental. Asked if River's chances had been damaged, Tevez said: "I don't think so. River have a lot more pressure playing at home and now it is 50-50. To play at home, sometimes it goes against you in a Libertadores final."

Security remains high on the agenda after River's fans smashed the windows of Boca's bus and left some of their players injured. One of Boca's most radical supporters was sent back to Argentina on Thursday after he had arrived at Madrid's Barajas Airport.

"He is one of the most important and dangerous Boca ultras," a spokesman for the Spanish police said. Tevez also called for calm around the match. "I think people are smart," he said. "They know they can't mess around here so the truth is everything should happen peacefully, as it should do. I think it's important for everyone involved to know that while it is a final, of course, it is a football match. We feel good because we're here and we thank the Spanish people for welcoming us."

FOCUS

Generation Amazing delivers sessions at refugees' facility in Germany

In the presence of HE Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, the ambassador of the State of Qatar in Germany, Generation Amazing has successfully delivered a series of football for development and knowledge transfer sessions in Berlin, Germany.

The activation kicked off at Tempelhof Airport in Berlin and, working together with Germany-based Engagement Partner streetfootballworld, Generation Amazing also brought together representatives from local partner organisations across seven countries in the German capital for a series of capacity building workshops around the programme methodology.

After visiting the activation, which formed part of the 2018 Football for Good Summit Commenting, Sheikh Saoud said: "Generation Amazing is really a great initiative from the Qatar 2022 organisers, especially to have this programme here in Berlin, in this area where you have refugee centres nearby.

"It is important to work together with streetfootballworld as a German partner, and I believe this will have a good impact both in social impact for the refugees and beneficiaries, but also in the sports community here in Germany." The Ambassador was also given an overview of the programme, which has reached over 250,000 beneficiaries to date in Qatar, the Middle East

and across Asia - and he took the opportunity to reiterate the importance of continuing to develop the already strong relationship between Germany and Qatar.

"As we know Germany is one of the leading nations in football. It is a very wise idea to partner with a German organisation. Once you do any event in a country, you have to do it with a local NGO, and I think streetfootballworld is a great partner and I am sure this will have a good impact within society."

For Ziad Kanaan, from Right to Play Lebanon and a representative of one of the 15 local partner organisations of Generation Amazing, the workshops and practical applications helped create new perspectives for the continued delivery to a diverse group of beneficiaries in his home country.

"It was inspiring to meet the other partners on the programme, especially those from India and other parts of the world," he explained. "Generation Amazing opened opportunities for coaches to be trained in conjunction with the Lebanese football association. For the children there are very few public spaces to play, so the Generation Amazing pitch is creating opportunities for children to play, grow their life and sports skills and have a positive social relationship within the different contexts."



HE Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, the ambassador of Qatar to Germany, with the participants of the workshops, organised by Generation Amazing.

With a number of social issues and challenges discussed and tackled through the use of football, Kanaan believes that being part of a legacy programme for the first FIFA World Cup in the Arab world is already showing a significant impact in Lebanon. He said: "Within our community gender

participation is also a challenge for us, and the new coaches trained through Generation Amazing are allowing girls to participate and to take it further. With the World Cup being hosted in the Middle East for the first time, it is a big sense of pride for us to be a part of this innovative and advanced programme

with Generation Amazing."

The activities and workshops in Berlin also included a focus on social entrepreneurship and building sustainable models which can ensure the long-term viability of the organisations helping Generation Amazing achieve the objective of positively impacting

the lives of one million young people by 2022. Generation Amazing also took part in the 2018 Football for Good Summit, which featured streetfootballworld partner organisations from across the world, as well as representatives of FIFA and UEFA, and former Germany international Marco Bode.