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HOCKEY | Page 3

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Saturday, December 8, 2018  
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# GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

## Cool Head saves Aussies from collapse in first Test

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FOOTBALL

# Bounedjah sets new league record in Al Sadd's big win

Algerian becomes the all-time top scorer in a single season in Qatar, beating Brazilian Clemerson's mark of 27 goals

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**B**aghdad Bounedjah became the Qatar league's all-time top scorer in a single season after his brace helped Al Sadd thrash Al Shahania 4-1 yesterday.

The victory also helped the Wolves close the gap on Al Duhail to just one point after the leaders stumbled to a 1-1 draw against 10th-placed Qatar Sports Club.

Bounedjah, who was the top scorer in the AFC Champions League, struck in the 50th and 76th minutes, while Hassan al-Haydos also recorded a double as Al Sadd reached 35 points from 14 matches, just one behind Al Duhail.

Algerian international Bounedjah thus took his personal tally to 28, beating the previous mark of 27 set by Brazilian Clemerson Soares for Al Gharafa during the 2007-08 season.

As expected, Al Sadd dominated possession and scripted more opportunities, substantiated by 63 per cent of ball possession by them at half-time. Interestingly, they maintained the same percentage at the end of the game.

After Al Shahania's Kesse Amanguoa was thwarted by Al Sadd goalkeeper Saad al-Dosari, Bounedjah missed a sitter, with rival goalkeeper Amer al-Amri parrying the ball with his leg.

Al-Haydos opened the scoring in the 23rd minute by slotting home a rebound after Akram Affi



Al Sadd's Baghdad Bounedjah exults after scoring against Shahania yesterday.

failed attempt at the goal.

Al Shahania were in no mood to give up, even though they had to play second fiddle to their formidable opponents in the second half, and drew parity as Luciano sent the ball in off a cross from the left by Kesse in the 42nd minute.

Al Sadd fired in three more goals after resumption, with Bounedjah being on target twice, to surpass Clemerson.

Earlier, Duhail recorded their third draw when they were held 1-1 by Qatar Sports Club.

Osama Omari had put Qatar SC ahead in the 22nd minute, but after a great deal of huffing and puffing Murad Naji saved Duhail's blushes with a 75th minute strike to help his team grab a point.

The return of Cameroonian star Samuel Eto'o strengthened Qatar SC's attack with Osama and Hussein Ali contributing to the team's cause.

Al Duhail continued to miss South Korean midfielder Nam Tae-Hee, who was injured while doing national duty for his native South Korea during the last international break.

Qatar SC matched Al Duhail move by move and even shocked the hosts by taking the lead.

Goalkeeper Khalifa Aboobacker completely misjudged the flight of the ball after Osama took the free-kick from the left. Neither did the defenders do anything about it. The free-kick was awarded when Al Duhail defender Murad Naji 'handled' the ball.



Murad Naji celebrates equalising for Al Duhail against Qatar SC.

Al Duhail created more chances, but nothing too strong that could give them a goal. Paolo Edmilson tried to split open the Qatar SC defence. So did Yousef El Arabi and Almoze Ali, all in vain.

The closest Al Duhail came to scoring in the first half was when Ali Afif sent a first-time volley over the bar off a cross by Edmilson from the right.

Al Duhail started the second half by replacing Luis Martin with Under-23 player Hazem Ahmed. Hazem immediately made his mark by moving forward and that resulted in a collision involving him and Qatar SC goalkeeper Jassim al-Hail.

Murad then came up with a long-ranger that went just wide on the hour mark. However, the right-back was not to be denied as he struck the equaliser for Al Duhail.

Indeed, Murad made amends for the offence he committed that led to Qatar SC's goal in similar fashion as he sent in a free-kick past the outstretched hands of Al Hail.

Al Duhail intensified their efforts as the game wore on, but could not find the winner.

CRICKET

# Somerville shines as NZ seal historic victory

AFP  
Abu Dhabi

**D**ebutant Will Somerville grabbed three key wickets to guide New Zealand to their first away series win over Pakistan in 49 years with a crushing 123-run win in the third and final Test yesterday.

The off-spinner took 3-52 and was aided by fellow spinner Ajaz Patel's 3-42 as Pakistan came up well short after being set a daunting 280-run target in 79 overs.

They crumbled to 156 in 56.1 overs on a weary pitch at Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi.

The victory gave New Zealand a 2-1 series win after they had taken the first Test by a narrow four-run margin at the same venue. Pakistan bounced back with an innings and 16-run win in the second Test in Dubai.

New Zealand's last away series win against Pakistan was a 1-0 victory in matches played in Pakistan in 1969.

Captain Kane Williamson, whose 139-run innings turned the match and the series in his side's favour, said: "It was fantastic. Beating Pakistan in their backyard is very tough.

"It feels pretty special, and this



Will Somerville, centre, and Tim Southee, left, both took three second innings wickets as New Zealand bowled out Pakistan for 156.

will be one that the guys remember for a long time.

"We know the game can ebb and flow very quickly but we came out and played very well today."

It was New Zealand's fifth Test series win in their last six played since November 2016. They beat Pakistan, Bangladesh, the West Indies and England - all at home - with the single loss came against South Africa.

Somerville, who took 4-75 in the first innings to finish with seven wickets in the match, broke a stubborn 43-run sixth-wicket stand between top scorer Babar Azam (51) and skipper Sarfraz Ahmed, who made 28.

Patel ended Azam's 114-ball resistance before getting the last wicket when he dismissed Hasan Ali for four, sparking celebrations among the New Zealand players.

Pakistan were again let down by sloppy batting and Sarfraz rued missed opportunities.

"We had our chances in all three Tests but we could not grab them," he said.

"It's very disappointing to lose a series in conditions which are our own."

Pakistan were off to a disastrous start when Mohamed Hafeez, in his last innings before he retires

from Test cricket, was bowled by fast bowler Tim Southee for eight.

Medium pacer Colin de Grandhomme had first-innings centurion Azhar Ali caught behind for five before Somerville's double strike pushed Pakistan to 55-5 at lunch.

Somerville had Haris Sohail caught off a tentative push in the slip with his third ball of the first over for nine and next ball had first innings centurion Asad Shafiq caught behind off the glove.

In the last over before lunch Imam-ul-Haq, watching four wickets fall at the other end, gave an easy catch to forward short-leg off Patel for 22.

Earlier, New Zealand declared their second innings on 353-7 after some 45 minutes of batting with Henry Nicholls remaining unbeaten on 126 and Williamson dismissed at his overnight score of 139.

That 212-run stand between Williamson which brought New Zealand back into the game on Thursday, was finally broken with the very first ball of the day.

Medium pacer Hasan Ali trapped Williamson leg before and even a review did not prolong the New Zealand skipper's innings.

## SCORECARD

<b>New Zealand 1st innings</b> 274 (K. Williamson 89, BJ Watling 77 not out; Bilal Asif 5-65, Yasir Shah 3-75)	129-4, Asif 36-6-62-0 (Inb), Azhar 1-0-2-0, Hafeez 1-0-3-0
<b>Pakistan 2nd innings</b> Imam-ul-Haq c Nicholls b Patel ... 22	Mohamed Hafeez b Southee ... 8
<b>Pakistan 1st innings</b> 348 (Azhar Ali 134, Asad Shafiq 104; W. Somerville 4-75)	Azhar Ali c Watling b de Grandhomme ... 5
<b>New Zealand 2nd innings</b> (overnight 272-4)	Haris Sohail c Taylor b Somerville ... 9
J. Raval lbw b Shaheen ..... 0	Asad Shafiq c Watling b Somerville ... 0
T. Latham c Sohail b Yasir ..... 10	Babar Azam c Southee b Patel 51
K. Williamson lbw b Hasan ..... 139	Sarfraz Ahmed b Somerville ..... 28
W. Somerville lbw b Yasir ..... 4	Bilal Asif c Watling b Southee ... 12
R. Taylor c Asif b Shaheen ..... 22	Yasir Shah c Patel b Southee ... 4
H. Nicholls not out ..... 126	Hasan Ali c Williamson b Patel 4
C. de Grandhomme c Asif b Yasir ..... 26	Shaheen Shah Afridi not out ... 2
BJ Watling b Yasir ..... 0	<b>Extras</b> (b 4, lb 6, nb 1) ..... 11
T. Southee not out ..... 15	<b>Total</b> : (all out; 56.1 overs) ... 156
<b>Extras</b> : (b 9, lb 1, nb 1) ..... 11	<b>Fall of wickets</b> : 1-19 (Hafeez), 2-32 (Azhar), 3-43 (Sohail), 4-43 (Shafiq), 5-55 (Imam), 6-98 (Sarfraz), 7-131 (Azam), 8-137 (Yasir), 9-150 (Azam)
<b>Total</b> : (for seven wickets dec; 113 overs) ..... 353	<b>Bowling</b> : Southee 12-3-42-3, Boulton 6-4-7-0, de Grandhomme 4-1-3-1, Patel 14-1-4-42-3, Somerville 20-2-52-3
<b>Did not bat</b> : BJ Watling, C. de Grandhomme, Ajaz Patel, T. Southee, T. Boult	<b>Result</b> : New Zealand won by 123 runs
<b>Fall of wickets</b> : 1-1 (Raval), 2-24 (Latham), 3-37 (Somerville), 4-60 (Taylor), 5-272 (Williamson), 6-334 (Grandhomme), 7-334 (Watling)	
Bowling: Hasan 16-5-62-1, Shaheen 20-5-85-2, Yasir 39-8-	



REPORT

# Cool Head keeps Aussies afloat in Adelaide Test

All of Australia's top four were back in the pavilion without passing 30



Virat Kohli and Ravichandran Ashwin celebrate Marcus Harris' wicket in Adelaide yesterday. At bottom, Travis Head celebrates reaching his half-century.

AFP  
Adelaide

Travis Head hit a stubborn half-century to keep Australia in the hunt yesterday after their top order slumped under sustained pressure from India's bowlers, leaving the first Test in Adelaide finely poised.

Batting on his home ground, Head kept his cool in the humid conditions to be 61 not out at stumps on day two, with Mitchell Starc unbeaten on eight.

His efforts helped steer Australia to 191-7 in reply to India's 250.

Off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin bowled beautifully to take three wickets, while Ishant Sharma and Jasprit Bumrah grabbed two each.

It was Head's second 50 in his third Test, with the Adelaide-born 24-year-old playing the sort of gutsy innings that his more



experienced teammates couldn't match.

All of Australia's top four were back in the pavilion without passing 30, with Aaron Finch (0) and Shaun Marsh (2) notable failures. It once again reinforced how much Australia is missing Steve Smith and David Warner, who

remain banned over their part in the South Africa ball-tampering affair.

"It was nice to do a job for the team and it will be an exciting day tomorrow," said Head.

"We hung in there. India bowled exceptionally well. It was (a) fantastic little fightback in the end and it will be an important first hour tomorrow. Every run will be valuable."

Debutant Marcus Harris, who made 26, added: "It was a tough day, it wasn't easy to score. I think we're in a decent position."

Ashwin agreed that the Test match for there for the taking.

"I see it as neck and neck as far as the game goes right now," he said.

India resumed on 250-9, but they were unable to add to the total with tailender Mohamed Shami out for six on the first ball of the day, caught behind by Tim Paine off Josh Hazlewood, leaving Bumrah unbeaten on 0.

Hazlewood finished with 3-52.

Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon all took two wickets each. In reply, Australia got off to a horror start with Finch's credentials as an opener again called into question after he was spectacularly bowled without scoring on only the third ball he faced.

A lovely delivery from Sharma took out his middle and off stumps after getting an inside edge as Finch attempted a drive.

Harris looked in good nick and unruffled by the occasion, hitting three fours in his solid 26. But he was undone by a drifting ball from Ashwin, getting an edge to Murali Vijay at silly mid-off and ending a 45-run partnership with a slimmed-down Usman Khawaja who was back after knee surgery.

Ashwin's off spin was causing problems and Marsh needlessly slashed at a wide delivery in the first over after lunch, dragging it onto his wicket.

The woeful shot extended his dire recent Test form and left Australia in trouble at 59-3.

SCORECARD

**India 1st innings** (overnight 250-9)

M. Shami c *Paine* b Hazlewood ...6  
J. Bumrah *not out* ...0

**Extras** (lb1) ...1  
**Total** (10 wickets, 88 overs) ...250

**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), 10-250 (Shami)

**Bowling:** Starc 19-4-63-2, Hazlewood 20-3-52-3, Cummins 19-3-49-2, Lyon 28-2-83-2, Head 21-2-0

**Australia 1st innings**

A. Finch b *Sharma* ...0  
M. Harris c *Vijay* b *Ashwin* ...26  
U. Khawaja c *Pant* b *Ashwin* ...28  
S. Marsh b *Ashwin* ...2  
P. Handscomb c *Pant* b *Bumrah* ...34  
T. Head *not out* ...61  
T. Paine c *Pant* b *Sharma* ...5  
P. Cummins *lbw* b *Bumrah* ...10  
M. Starc *not out* ...8  
**Extras** (lb9, b6, nb2) ...17  
**Total:** (7 wickets, 88 overs) ...191

**To bat:** Josh Hazlewood, Nathan Lyon

**Fall of wickets:** 1-0 (Finch), 2-45 (Harris), 3-59 (Marsh), 4-87 (Khawaja), 5-120 (Handscomb), 6-127 (Paine), 7-177 (Cummins)

**Bowling:** Sharma 15-6-31-2, Bumrah 20-9-34-2, Shami 16-6-51-0, Ashwin 33-9-50-3, Vijay 41-10-0

**Toss:** India

Marsh has now slumped to six consecutive single-figure scores, failing to step up in the absence of Smith and Warner.

Khawaja, whose Test preparations were disrupted after the shock arrest of his brother this week for allegedly framing a love-rival with a fake terror plot, was Ashwin's next victim.

Wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant took an excellent catch after a turning ball flicked off Khawaja's glove. He was out for 28 on a review decision.

A gritty knock from Peter Handscomb, brought into the side for all-rounder Mitch Marsh, ended on 34 soon after tea with Bumrah breaking what was shaping as a handy partnership with Head. It brought Paine to the crease, but he was unable to stop the rot and added only five runs before becoming Sharma's second scalp. Cummins joined Head and they began to find gaps in the field as India tired, putting on a 50-run stand before Cummins lbw to Bumrah for 10 late in the day.

SPOTLIGHT

## Australia board chief urges India to get behind day-night Tests

AFP  
Adelaide

Australia's cricket chief yesterday urged India to reconsider its opposition to day-night Tests with crowd numbers hurt by their refusal to play under lights in Adelaide.

Cricket Australia had originally pencilled in the ongoing opening Test of the current series as a pink-ball match, but India balked at the idea.

The Indians, who are the world's top-ranked team, have yet to play a day-night Test and they did not want to risk their first one during such a high-profile series.

In day-night Tests over the past three years, Adelaide's opening-day crowds numbered around 47,000, 32,000 and 55,000.

But on Thursday only 24,000 passed through the turnstiles, which new CA chief executive Kevin Roberts blamed on fewer interstate visitors who would have come for the night-time spectacle.

"We think we would've had 15,000 or so interstate visitors if it was a day-night Test so there's no doubting we've lost that group of fans," he told SEN

radio. Asked if the poor crowd had convinced him that the Adelaide Test should be day-night, Roberts replied: "Absolutely. It matters what the fans think and they've voted with their feet."

Those numbers (in previous years) are incredible so we're really excited about getting back to that in the future."

Roberts said he hoped to convince India of the merits of a day-night Adelaide Test on their next tour of Australia in 2020/21.

"Let's hope so. Part of that fabric of cricket both nationally and internationally is so rich so we embrace the fact that they've had a different view about this Test match," he said.

"We hope that the sentiment from fans is something India can see." According to Roberts, India is the only national team still holding out on day-night Tests, which CA believes is one of the key ways to retain interest in the five-day version of the game following the rise of the quickfire Twenty20 format.

Australia have played four day-night Tests since 2015, three of them in Adelaide, winning them all.

They play Sri Lanka under lights in Brisbane in January.

SELECTION

## Pak pacer Amir back for SA series

AFP  
Lahore

Pakistan selectors yesterday recalled fast bowler Mohamed Amir in the 16-member squad for the three-match Test tour of South Africa starting later this month. Sarfraz Ahmed will lead the side, which opens the tour with the first Test at Centurion from December 26.

Pakistan will also play five one-day internationals and three Twenty20 internationals on the tour, for which squads will be announced later.

The second Test will be played at Cape Town from Jan 3 to 7 next year, while the third and final match is in Johannesburg from Jan 11 to 15. Amir was dropped from the side after failing to get a single wicket in three Asia Cup matches in United Arab Emirates (UAE) in September this year.

He missed Pakistan's two-match Test series against Australia and then three Tests against New Zealand - both in UAE - but chief selector Inzamam-ul-Haq believes the left-arm has regained his form in domestic matches.

"Amir makes a comeback in the team after regaining his form in domestic cricket, giving strength to a fast bowling attack that includes four pace bowlers," said Inzamam while announcing the squad.



Also staging comebacks are leg-spinner Shadab Khan, and openers Fakhar Zaman and Shan Masood. Zaman made his Test debut against Australia before he was ruled out of the New Zealand series with a knee injury, while Shadab missed both series due to a hamstring problem. Masood, who played the most recent of his 12 Tests in Oct last year, was also brought back after recent good form, scoring twin hundreds in a four-day match against New Zealand 'A' two months ago.

**Squad:** Sarfraz Ahmed (captain), Imam-ul-Haq, Fakhar Zaman, Shan Masood, Azhar Ali, Haris Sohail, Asad Shafiq, Babar Azam, Mohamed Rizwan, Yasir Shah, Shadab Khan, Mohamed Abbas, Hassan Ali, Mohamed Amir, Faheem Ashraf, Shaheen Shah Afridi.

BOTTOMLINE

## Williamson savours 'special' series win against Pakistan

AFP  
Abu Dhabi

Kane Williamson termed his team's first away series win over Pakistan in 49 years as "special" after New Zealand thumped Pakistan by 123 runs in the third and final Test in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

Williamson's sublime 139 in New Zealand's second innings aided by an unbeaten 126 by Henry Nicholls helped New Zealand set a daunting 280-run target for Pakistan on the fifth and final day.

Spinners Will Somerville and Ajaz Patel, and fast bowler Tim Southee took three wickets apiece as Pakistan folded for 156 in 56.1 overs on a sluggish fifth day pitch at Sheikh Zayed Stadium.

New Zealand's last away series win over Pakistan was in 1969 when they won the second Test in Karachi and drew the other two in Lahore and Dacca.

New Zealand came this time as underdogs to the tough conditions of Pakistan's



temporary home in United Arab Emirates, a fact which Williamson felt made the victory special.

"It was a fantastic series to be a part of and obviously to go one-all and then have a deciding match that goes five days with both teams in with a chance of a result proves it was a special win," said William-

son, who has now captained New Zealand to victory in five of their last six series.

"Certainly from our perspective to have won the series against a side like Pakistan who are formidable in these conditions is quite special." New Zealand won a hard-fought thrilling first Test by a mere four runs in Abu Dhabi before going down by an innings and 16 runs in the second in Dubai. Williamson said he was proud of his players, most of whom had not played in Asia.

"Without a doubt I am proud of them. I said inexperience in terms of international exposure but they have played domestic cricket and bowled a lot of overs.

"I don't think (it was) a perfect game from either side. I think Pakistan played close to a perfect game in Dubai but it was a tough fight. Each team tried to remain afloat and in the end we pulled it off."

Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed admitted his team spurned good chances in both defeats. "It's a very disappointing series loss for us," said Sarfraz, whose team has now lost three consecutive Tests at Sheikh Zayed Stadium. "We had our chances but we

could not grab them. "If you talk of the first Test we bowled them out for a low score but did not take a big lead. Here too we did not take a big lead and had to pay for that."

Pressure is sure to increase on Sarfraz as his role as captain comes under closer scrutiny. He has now lost five of his ten Tests as skipper, with four wins and a draw, but he said it is not the right time to leave the post. "Look, when it (defeat) happens then one thinks on that," said Sarfraz. "But before an important tour of South Africa if you think like that, then it's not beneficial for the team."

"If I think that I am making mistakes and if the Pakistan team is not winning because of me, then I will think about getting away from it. And if there is someone else who is better suited for the captaincy of the Pakistan team, then I will do."

New Zealand head home to start a two-Test series against Sri Lanka next week while Pakistan have one one-day warm-up match in South Africa before starting the first of three Tests in Centurion on December 26.

### 'He should play baseball' - MLB fans rave over Cummins run out

**Adelaide:** Cricket might not be well understood in the United States, but baseball fans were raving about Australian Pat Cummins' spectacular run out of Indian centurion Cheteshwar Pujara in the first Test at Adelaide.

The Aussie fast bowler produced an amazing piece of skill on Thursday to get to the ball with lightning pace, snatch it up with one hand then throw it while in the air diving and twisting. It shattered the stumps from side-on, with Pujara well short of the crease after rashly attempting a quick single on the second last ball of the day on Thursday. Cummins' effort was all the more impressive as it came at the end of a long, hot day in which he had bowled 19 overs. Former Australian great Adam Gilchrist called it "the best

run out ever" and his exploits also impressed Major League Baseball watchers. "Check out this insane throw from Australian cricket dude and potential future MLB third baseman Pat Cummins," said a story on the official MLB website.

"Look, I don't know enough about cricket to tell you what a 'rapid over' is or how impressive it is to compile 19 of those bad boys, but I can tell you that this bucket-hatted young Aussie would slot in phenomenally as a big league infielder." The writer added: "Someone give this cricket boy a Gold Glove and a contract." Cricket is a niche sport in the US, but is slowly gaining in popularity, mostly among large expat communities, and is seen as a potentially lucrative new market to help grow the game.

HOCKEY WORLD CUP

# Holder Australia hammer China 11-0

Govers scores a hat-trick for the defending champs, England knock out Ireland with 4-2 win



Australia's Blake Govers (left) in action against Du Chen of China during the men's Field Hockey World Cup match at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar yesterday. (EPA)

FIH  
Bhubaneswar

Australia finished their Pool B campaign with a dominating 11-0 win over a hapless China in the ongoing Men's Hockey World Cup here at Kalinga Stadium yesterday.

However, as England defeated Ireland 4-2, both England and China will progress to the cross-overs. England will play New Zealand, while China will take on France on Monday.

Reigning world champions Australia were already confirmed as the winners of Pool B following their impressive 3-0 victory over England on Tuesday, but that did not stop them wanting to maintain their winning streak in today's meeting against a China team that were unbeaten coming into the match.

The Kookaburras were at their scintillating best in the first quarter to open up a 2-0 lead, with Blake Govers finding the roof of the China net from a penalty corner before a tap-in from Aran Zelewski doubled the advantage.

Four Australian goals arrived in the fourth quarter, with Tom Craig, a second for Govers, Jeremy Hayward and a fine team goal finished off by the exceptional Jake Whetton, who showed incredible reactions to dive in and

guide the ball home from close range.

At 6-0, the Australians could have been forgiven for easing off in the two remaining quarters, but it is not something any Kookaburras side could ever be accused of. A further five goals flew into the China net, with player of the match Blake Govers completing his hat-trick alongside efforts from Tim Brand (2), Dylan Wotherspoon and Flynn Ogilvie on target as Australia made it three wins from three matches.

The boys were having a lot of fun out there, a lot of goals were scored so I guess we were in the groove," said Australia's Matthew Swann after the match. "There were a lot of selfless acts out there, when guys could have taken the shot themselves but laid it off to a guy who was in a better spot, and it is hard [for China] to protect the whole goal."

The second game of the day saw Ireland play England with both teams having one point each at the start of the game. China's heavy defeat meant that both Ireland and England only needed to draw in order to progress through to the knock-out stages, as their respective goal differences were now superior to the team from Asia.

English player David Condon opened the scoring in the last minute of the first quarter. This followed two scoring attempts

from Liam Ansell and Mark Gleghorne, both off target.

At the 25th minute, England were very close to doubling their advantage as Ian Sloan missed a great opportunity with a hit just past the post.

The start of the second half was full of excitement. Ireland had to put pressure on their opponents to try and find an equaliser to ensure a place in the next round.

They managed to do so in the 35th minute through Chris Cargio. However, two minutes later, Liam Ansell gave the lead again to England thanks to a fantastic hit into the roof of the net.

This was not enough to discourage the Green Machine who, just a few seconds later, equalized again with a beautiful drag-flick from Shane O'Donoghue from a penalty-corner. But England went immediately on the attack again and scored a third goal only one minute later with a superb deflection from James Gall. Ireland nearly equalised again seconds before the end of the third quarter but Michael Darling missed the target. In the last minute of the game, England converted a penalty-corner for their fourth goal by Mark Gleghorne. That meant that England qualified for the cross-overs while Ireland were eliminated.

England's Luke Taylor said: "Today we took our chances. That really helped us and that

will give us confidence going forward. We're not going to worry about anyone else. We're going to go out there and play our game and do the best we can, really."

Today, the final matches in Pool C will take place, with Belgium facing South Africa at 1700IST before home favourites India take on Canada at 1900IST.

India are currently top of Pool C thanks to a marginally superior goal difference over second placed Belgium, with Canada holding onto third place ahead of South Africa, again on 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.

While South Africa captain Tim Drummond expects a strong challenge from the Belgians, he feels his team are improving and will be determined to show their own qualities.

"We were disappointed did not get the win against Canada after a much-improved overall team performance," said Drummond.

"We created many good scoring opportunities but unfortunately we were not clinical with our chances. Our game against Belgium is one which we will be coming out all guns blazing to get a result. We respect

the Belgians but we are going to play with complete belief in our abilities to make sure we do our country proud! Overall I feel we have played some high quality hockey in patches but have not been consistent enough and taken our chances. Against Belgium we will be looking to improve in both aspects. I am confident that if we execute our game plan then we will give us every chance of achieving our goals for the game."

Looking ahead to his team's match against host nation India, Canada Head Coach Paul Bundy said: "We have yet to show our true potential in the first two pool games. It's important for us to remain positive and competitive as we enter our final pool match against India."

"Over the last couple years we have been in a similar crossroads with India [Rio 2016 Olympic Games/Hockey World League semi-final] and come away with results. We will draw on those experiences, as we know that all the pressure is on India as the host country and team looking to top the pool."

RESULTS

**Pool B**

Australia.....	11	China.....	0
Player of the Match: Blake Govers (AUS)			
Ireland.....	2	England.....	4
Player of the Match: Liam Ansell (ENG).			

TENNIS

## Mauresmo withdraws as Davis Cup captain to coach Pouille

Reuters  
Paris

Former world number one Amelie Mauresmo has turned her back on becoming France's new Davis Cup captain, opting instead to work with French player Lucas Pouille.

A statement from the French Tennis Federation on Thursday confirmed the U-turn by the 39-year-old who had been named in June to become the first woman to captain the French team. Mauresmo, who previously captained France's Fed Cup team, was to due take over from Yannick Noah, whose third stint in charge ended in a disappointing defeat by Croatia in last month's final held in Lille's soccer stadium.

"(Amelie Mauresmo) has accepted this challenge and renounces the position of captain of the Davis Cup France team to carry out this mission," the statement said.

"The French Tennis Federation supports and encourages this project which serves the interests of French tennis."

Pierre Cheret, the FFT's National Technical Director, said he would begin the process of finding a new Davis Cup captain who would also be responsible for the men's team at the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. "It was important and logical for Lucas, after his fruitful collaboration with Emmanuel Plaque, to look for the person most likely to continue his development," Cheret said. "As head of the French teams, I will soon make my

proposal for the new captain to the committee."

Mauresmo had expressed disappointment at the International Tennis Federation's (ITF) decision to revamp the Davis Cup from next year in conjunction with Spanish investment group Kosmos with whom they agreed a 25-year \$3 billion deal.

An ITF vote in August gave the green light to replace the current 'home and away' World Group format with an 18-nation finals week to be staged in Madrid next November.

"I tell myself that all these young people who watched the Davis Cup on television, who have had incredible moments in the stadiums, will never be able to live this again," Mauresmo said earlier this year after the announcement was made.

Pouille, ranked 32 in the world, had also criticised the competition's revamp after Croatia's Marin Cilic beat him in Lille to seal the last Davis Cup final in its current guise.

Pouille said afterwards he would not play in the Davis Cup again, while other members of the French team also criticised the direction in which the competition was moving.

The 24-year-old said on Thursday that he was excited to work with Mauresmo, who also enjoyed a successful coaching stint with Britain's former world number one Andy Murray.

"I am very happy to start my new collaboration with @AmelieMauresmo! Her experience as a player and coach can help me achieve my goals," he wrote on Twitter.

WEIGHTLIFTING

## European youth champ banned for life

Reuters  
Sofia

Bulgarian weightlifting suffered another blow yesterday when European youth champion Dayana Dimitrova was banned for life after a second doping offence since April 2017, the Balkan country's federation said yesterday.

The life ban for the 18-year-old, who won the European women's title in the 48-kg category in Poland last month, comes as Bulgaria struggles to restore its reputation in a sport already under fire over widespread doping offences.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has threatened to remove weightlifting from the Paris 2024 Games if it fails to improve its record, and the sport remains on probation.

The Bulgarian weightlifting federation said Dimitrova had used a banned diuretic while training privately. Her coach said she had used the drug to

lose weight before the competition in Poland.

Dimitrova, who served a six-month ban after a positive doping test just before the youth world championships in Thailand in April 2017, had been training separately and refused to join national team training camps.

"We will react pointedly to any attempts for amateur activity of personal trainers and therefore we will continue to insist on centralised training in national teams as a way of strictly controlling the medical rehabilitation of competitors and of taking responsibility," the federation said in a statement.

The International Weightlifting Federation has adopted a tougher anti-doping policy this year under which repeat-offender nations can be banned outright from the Olympics.

Following repeated bans for doping, Bulgarian weightlifters returned to international competition in July after the domestic federation paid a \$250,000 IWF fine.

GOLF

# Eagle on 17 propels Schwartzel into 2nd round lead

Reuters  
Johannesburg

Charl Schwartzel sank a 75 yard eagle on his penultimate hole to card a second round eight under par 63 for the lead at the halfway point of the European Tour's South African Open at the Randpark Golf Club yesterday.

Schwartzel's 12 under par tournament total is one ahead of Zander Lombard 68, and home player Zander Lombard (68).

Schwartzel made a steady start with gains on the first and fifth holes, but sprang to life with four birdies and an eagle on his back nine.

The eagle came after a wayward drive on the par five 17th as he chipped in from 75 yards, and could yet be a pivotal moment as he seeks a first win in his home Open championship after twice finishing runner-up.

"It was one of my worst tee shots of the week so far," Schwartzel admitted. "I figured if I could walk off with four or five that would be good. I managed to hit a good little third shot there."

Former Masters champion Schwartzel, 34, believes he has been hitting the ball better than ever in practice, but is still looking for his first tour title in al-

most three years. "I feel like I've been playing well, I've been hitting very low scores in practice and on the range I'm hitting the ball as good as I ever have. It's just this little thing called golf... I'm trying to figure it out," he said.

"The golf courses are not playing very long, so if you are hitting it straight you are leaving yourself with a mid-iron into these par fives so you should be taking advantage. I would love to win this one, I've given myself a good chance and I'm looking forward to the weekend."

Four-time Major winner Ernie Els (71) is at five under par for the tournament, level on the leaderboard with his nephew, Jovan Rebula (71), who is the leading amateur in the field. Rebula, 21, claimed the British Amateur Championship at Royal Aberdeen in June.

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 2ND ROUND SCORES

130-Charl Schwartzel	67-63
131-Madalitso Muthiya (ZAM)	63-68
132-Kurt Kitayama (USA)	63-69,
Zander Lombard	64-68, Louis Oosthuizen
62-70	
133-Jbe Kruger	66-67, Mark Williams (ZIM)
65-68	
134-Brandon Grace	66-68, Matt Wallace (ENG)
65-69	
135-Thomas Aiken	67-68, Yikeun Chang (KOR)
70-65	
136-Bernd Ritthammer (GER)	67-69,
Adilson da Silva (BRA)	66-70,
Daniel van Tonger	69-67

SELECTED

137-Ernie Els	66-71, Shaun Norris
70-67	
138-Brandon Stone	71-67
140-Chris Paisley (ENG)	70-70
141-Justin Harding	69-72
145-Dylan Frittelli	73-72.



Charl Schwartzel of South Africa lines up a putt during the second round of the South African Open at the Randpark Golf Club in Johannesburg yesterday. (EPA)

FOCUS

# Henry's record night sparks Titans' rout of Jags

Reuters  
New York

**D**errick Henry tied an NFL record with a 99-yard touchdown run and rushed for a franchise-record 238 yards on 17 carries Thursday night as the Tennessee Titans kept their playoff hopes alive by pasting the Jacksonville Jaguars 30-9 in Nashville, Tennessee.

Henry also matched a franchise record with four rushing touchdowns. Tennessee (7-6) won its second game in a row and moved within a half-game of the Baltimore Ravens for the second AFC wild-card spot. Jacksonville (4-9) lost for the eighth time in nine games and clinched its seventh losing season in eight years.

Henry's 99-yard jaunt, which tied the mark set by Dallas' Tony Dorsett at Minnesota in January 1983, came on the first play after Leonard Fournette was stopped for no gain by Rashaan Evans on fourth-and-goal to deny the Jaguars a second-quarter lead.

Henry burst free off left tackle and broke three tackles on his way to the record book, stiff-arming A.J. Bouye to the ground around the Tennessee 25. Myles Jack tried and failed to bring Henry down at the Jacksonville 20 as the crowd roared. The play

gave Tennessee a 13-2 lead with 7:07 left.

Ryan Succop's 33-yard field goal with 10 seconds left in the half made it 16-2 at the break. Henry ended the game's competitive phase in the third quarter with touchdown runs of 16 and 54 yards less than two minutes apart, upping the margin to 30-2 at the 5:30 mark.

Henry had a chance for a fifth touchdown, but his third-down run from the Jaguars 2-yard line was stopped for a 1-yard loss. Multiple Jacksonville defenders celebrated the play, about the only thing they had to enjoy.

Jaguars quarterback Cody Kessler completed 25 of 43 passes for 240 yards and a 7-yard scoring strike to Dede Westbrook with 1:49 left in the third quarter. Titans quarterback Marcus Mariota hit 18 of 24 attempts for 162 yards with an interception.

Jacksonville's other points came on a safety with 59 seconds left in the first quarter when punt returner Cameron Batson muffed the ball and was tackled in the end zone.

Tennessee Titans running back Derrick Henry (right) runs for a touchdown during the second half against the Jacksonville Jaguars at Nissan Stadium.

PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports



PREVIEW

# Brady, Patriots head to site of struggles at Dolphins

They play extremely well at home. We haven't played well down there'

Reuters  
New York

**T**om Brady is 7-9 when playing on the road against the Miami Dolphins.

Let that statistic sink in: Brady, the 13-time Pro Bowl quarterback who has led the New England Patriots to five Super Bowl titles, winning MVP honours in four of those ultimate games, has lost more than he has won at the Dolphins.

The Patriots have no trouble winning at home against the Dolphins, including 38-7 earlier this season. But, whether it's the humid weather or the distractions of South Beach, the Patriots have lost four of their past five games at Hard Rock Stadium. "It's a big challenge, winning down there," Patriots offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels told *The Boston Herald*. "They play extremely well at home. We haven't played well down there."

Miami won 27-20 last year at home against the Patriots. Dolphins cornerback Xavien Howard intercepted Brady twice, and the Patriots went 0-for-11 on third down. Tomorrow, the Patriots (9-3) can clinch their NFL-record 10th straight division title with a tie or a win. Miami (6-6) is still alive in the battle for a playoff berth, although the Dolphins are a bit of a long shot.

New England is a seven-point favourite tomorrow, and Miami's monumental challenge of trying to knock off the Patriots just got significantly more difficult.

Howard, a Pro Bowl candidate who leads the NFL with seven interceptions - including four in the past two weeks - is likely to miss the Patriots game due to injury. He hurt his knee during his second interception in last week's Dolphins win over the Buffalo Bills. But Howard, perhaps due to adrenaline, missed just one play and finished the game.

On Wednesday, he did not practice. "(Howard) is one of our best players if not our best player on defense," Dolphins coach Adam Gase said. "If he can't go, we have to make some adjustments."

Howard, the reigning AFC



New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady looks to make a pass against the Minnesota Vikings during the second quarter at Gillette Stadium in Foxboro, Massachusetts, on December 2. (EPA)

Defensive Player of the Week, is expected to return this season, Gase said.

Brady (knee) and tight end Rob Gronkowski (ankle, back) were limited in practice on Wednesday, but both Patriots stars are expected to play on Sunday.

Even so, the Patriots are wary of the Dolphins defense, which

ranks second in the NFL with 19 interceptions. "There's a lot to deal with," McDaniels said. "They have an aggressive, penetrating front, and they mix their calls and coverages quite a bit."

Offensively, the Dolphins got quarterback Ryan Tannehill back from the injury list in last week's win over the Buffalo Bills. He had

missed five games due to an injured throwing shoulder.

The Dolphins, who are 5-1 at home this season, have faced numerous injuries, especially at wide receiver, where they have lost two of their biggest playmakers: Albert Wilson and Jakeem Grant.

But wide receiver Danny

Amendola, who missed last week's game due to a knee injury, is expected to play against his former team, the Patriots. Amendola, who has played 11 games this season, leads the Dolphins in catches (48) and yards (469). "I think," Gase said, "he wants to play in this game as badly as anyone."

SPOTLIGHT

# Seahawks, Vikings look to improve playoff chances

Reuters  
Seattle

**A**s the NFL season reaches its final quarter, the Seattle Seahawks and Minnesota Vikings are in position to earn NFC wild-card playoff berths.

That might not be the case after Monday night's meeting between the teams in Seattle.

The Seahawks (7-5) have won three straight games to move a half-game ahead of the Vikings (6-5-1) for the final two playoff spots. But Carolina, Philadelphia and Washington are all 6-6, making for a tight race the rest of the way.

"These are must-win games for us. Every week, we approach it like that," Seahawks left tackle Duane Brown said after Sunday's 43-16 victory against San Francisco. "We approach every week like a playoff game and that's the kind of intensity guys came out with from kickoff on."

The Vikings are coming off a 24-10 loss at New England.

"Right now, we're kind of an up-and-down-team a little bit," Vikings coach Mike Zimmer said, "and that's the thing that frustrates me the most. We need to develop more consistency."

The Vikings have been especially inconsistent on offense, totalling fewer than 300 yards in three of their past four games. Under first-year offensive coordinator John DeFilippo, they have the fourth-fewest rushing attempts and

the third-most passing attempts in the league, causing Zimmer to publicly express concern about the play-calling.

Dalvin Cook had a season-high 84 yards rushing against the Patriots on only nine carries. He added a career-high eight receptions.

"If I get five (touches), I get 10, two, whatever, I'm just trying to make a play to help my team win," Cook said. "I wasn't surprised by anything that happened in the game."

The Vikings could find some success through the air, as Seattle has been allowing 315 yards passing over their past four games. Minnesota's Kirk Cousins leads the league with 350 completions, with wide receiver Adam Thielen tops in receptions (98) and second in yards (1,166).

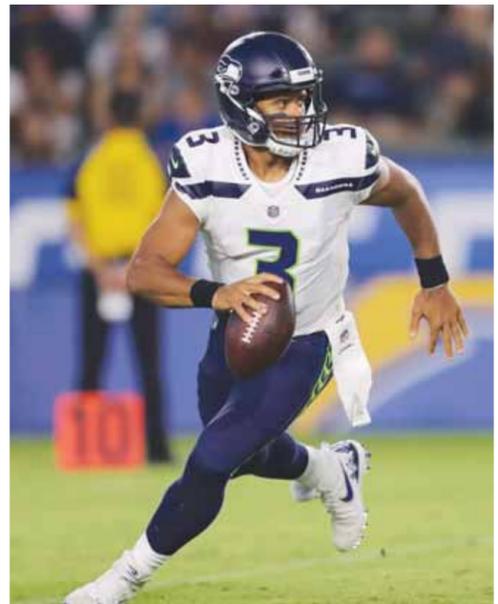
The Seahawks have found a better balance on offence.

Seattle leads the NFL with 148.8 yards rushing per game and has grounded out 150-plus yards in seven of its past eight games.

Last week, Russell Wilson attempted just six passes in the first half but threw for three touchdowns. In the three-game winning streak, Wilson has eight touchdown passes and no interceptions, averaging about 250 yards passing.

"I love the way it's fitting together for us," Seahawks coach Pete Carroll said.

The Seahawks likely will be without guard D.J. Fluker, who strained his hamstring last weekend.



Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson in action against Los Angeles Chargers at the StubHub Center, Carson. (EPA)

NBA

# Blazers hand Suns seventh straight loss

Lillard scores 25 points with eight assists and five rebounds for Blazers in their 108-86 victory

Reuters  
Portland

Damian Lillard scored 25 points and dished out eight assists despite sitting out the entire fourth quarter as the Portland Trail Blazers rolled past the visiting Phoenix Suns 108-86 on Thursday night.

Jake Layman came off the bench to score a career-high 24 points on 10-for-13 shooting and grab seven rebounds for the Trail Blazers, who snapped a three-game losing streak. Troy Daniels scored 15 points for Phoenix, which has lost seven in a row. Josh Jackson had 14 points, and Deandre Ayton added 11 points and eight boards for the Suns.

The Blazers, who had lost eight of their previous 11 games, led the entire way after a 2-0 deficit, forging a 34-9 advantage after one quarter. They built a 31-point lead in the fourth quarter and finished with a 56-41 advantage in the rebound battle.

Lillard was 8 of 14 from the field. Both he and Layman knocked down 3 of 5 attempts from beyond the arc. The Suns shot 38.5 percent from the field and made only 5 of 27 shots from 3-point range.

Portland was playing without guard CJ McCollum, who sat out the game with an ankle injury. Phoenix was without its top two scorers who are saddled with injuries - guard Devin Booker (hamstring) and forward T.J. Warren (ankle). The Blazers have won eight games in a row against the Suns dating to November 2016.

Lillard scored 21 points and Layman added 17 as Portland took a 62-41 advantage into intermission.

The Blazers shot 54.5 percent from the field while the Suns fired at a 38.1 percent clip, making only 2 of 9 attempts from the 3-point arc.

Portland increased its lead to 87-59 after three quarters. The Blazers pumped the difference to 99-68 midway through the final period. Phoenix got no closer than 22 points the rest of the way.

With Lillard scoring 15 points on 6-for-6 shooting - including three 3-pointers - the Blazers burst to a 31-5 lead as the Suns began the game shooting 2 of 17 from the field.

Layman contributed 15 points on 6-for-6 shooting - including three 3-pointers - in the quarter. Portland extended the margin to 53-27 midway through the second quarter.

The Blazers settled for a 21-point lead at the break.



Phoenix Suns forward Richaun Holmes (left) defends the basket against Portland Trail Blazers guard Damian Lillard during the second half at Moda Center. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

**JAZZ CRUSH REELING ROCKETS**

Derrick Favors recorded a double-double off the bench, and

Joe Ingles helped shoulder the early load on offense as the Utah Jazz continued their strong play with a 118-91 demolition of the

Houston Rockets on Thursday in Salt Lake City. Utah (13-13) has won 5 of 7 games to reach .500 for the first

time since November 17. Favours finished with 24 points and 10 rebounds in just 25 minutes while Ingles totalled 18 points on 6-of-9 shooting.

The Jazz lost starting centre Rudy Gobert to an ejection at the 9:13 mark of the first quarter and received only six points from Donovan Mitchell yet coasted to victory against the listless Rockets, leading by as many as 37 points.

James Harden paced the Rockets with 15 points but shot 5 of 16 from the floor and recorded seven turnovers. Chris Paul had five turnovers and five assists to go along with his 12 points. Clint Capela added 12 points and 10 rebounds for the Rockets, who are 1-5 over their past six road games.

Houston (11-13) has dropped six of its past eight games overall. Dante Exum (15 points), Ricky Rubio (13) and Jae Crowder (12) all scored in double figures for Utah.

The Jazz opened the second half with 15-2 blitz that extended its eight-point halftime lead to 68-47 at the 7:20 mark of the frame.

The Rockets, who totalled nine points in the fourth quarter while blowing a double-digit halftime lead at Minnesota on Monday, tallied 11 points in the third quarter against the Jazz. Gobert was whistled for a foul on the opening tip and an offensive foul moments later.

He reacted to the second infraction with a violent swing at items stacked on the scorer's table and was ejected. Utah responded by closing the first quarter with an 11-2 run as the Rockets recorded as many turnovers (six) in the period as baskets. The Jazz extended to a 47-32 lead in the second before Harden led a comeback, scoring eight points during a 13-6 run that closed the half.

However, Ingles and Crowder opened the third with 3-pointers sandwiched around Houston turnovers before Crowder completed a three-point play.

Paul scored 10 points in the first half to reach 17,000 for his career.

He stands 142 assists shy of joining Jason Kidd, Magic Johnson, Oscar Robertson, and John Stockton as the only players in league history to produce 17,000 points, 9,000 assists, and 4,000 rebounds.

**RESULTS**

Boston	128-100	New York
Portland	108-86	Phoenix
Utah	118-91	Houston

MLB

# Valbuena, Castillo die in car crash

Reuters  
New York

Free agent infielder Luis Valbuena and former major league infielder Jose Castillo died on Thursday in a car crash in Venezuela, where they were playing for a winter league team.

Their club, Cardenales de Lara, confirmed the death of Valbuena, 33, and Castillo, 37. Both played for the team on Thursday before the accident.

According to media accounts from Venezuela, the crash occurred in Yaracuy. Conflicting reports indicated the car they were in either hit a rock or swerved to avoid a rock before going off the road. The chauffeur and infielder Carlos Rivero, a teammate of Valbuena and Castillo who was also in the car, survived.

All three players were born in Venezuela.

Valbuena was in the major leagues as recently as August, when he was released by the Los Angeles Angels. He hit .199 with a .253 on-base percentage, a .335 slugging percentage, nine homers and 33 RBIs in 96 games for Los Angeles this year.

The Angels tweeted Thursday night, "We are deeply saddened to hear of the passing of former Angel Luis Valbuena and former MLB infielder Jose Castillo. Our thoughts and

prayers are with their loved ones during this time of grief."

Primarily a third baseman who also saw action at the other three infield positions, Valbuena hit a career-high 25 homers for the Houston Astros in 2015. In an 11-year major league career, he batted .226 with a .310 on-base percentage, a .394 slugging percentage, 114 homers and 367 RBIs in 1,011 games.

Valbuena broke into the major leagues with the Seattle Mariners in 2008. He subsequently played for the Cleveland Indians (2009-11), the Chicago Cubs (2012-14), the Astros (2015-16) and the Angels (2017-18).

Castillo played five years in the majors, for the Pittsburgh Pirates (2004-07), the San Francisco Giants (2008) and the Astros (2008). In 592 career games, he hit .254 with a .296 on-base percentage, a .379 slugging percentage, 39 homers and 218 RBIs.

He played mostly second base and third base.

Rivero, 30, had a brief major league stint with the Boston Red Sox in 2014. He collected four hits in seven at-bats (.571 average) while hitting a home run and driving in three runs.

He was in the minor leagues in the United States as recently as 2017, playing for the Arizona Diamondbacks' Triple-A Reno affiliate. He played this year for Tijuana in the Mexican League.

**Murray will fulfil A's contract**

Oklahoma quarterback Kyler Murray will join the Oakland Athletics in time for spring training, despite speculation he might choose to enter the 2019 NFL Draft instead, his agent, Scott Boras, told the *San Francisco Chronicle* on Thursday. "Kyler has every intention of fulfilling his agreement with the A's and he's grateful he has had the chance to pursue his college goals," Boras told the *Chronicle*. "He will be in spring training with the A's."

On Thursday, the Associated Press named Murray as its Player of the Year in college football. Murray is one of three finalists - all quarterbacks - for the Heisman Trophy, which will be awarded today night in New York. After replacing 2017 Heisman Trophy-winning QB Baker Mayfield at Oklahoma this season, Murray completed 241 passes, 40 of them for touchdowns, for 4,053 yards. He also rushed for 892 yards and 11 touchdowns. The other finalists are Alabama's Tua Tagovailoa and Ohio State's Dwayne Haskins. Murray opened some of the speculation about his future last weekend when he spoke with Tim Tebow of ESPN about the NFL. "I think that's something me and my family will talk about

at the end of the season and weigh out the options of what the NFL thinks of me," he said. "Right now, my future's kinda already planned out, but we'll see what happens." Oakland made Murray the No 9 overall pick in the MLB draft in June. "Kyler said more than a week ago that he's going to spring training," Boras said. "When people come around this kid and ask him all this stuff about his future and he said, 'We'll talk about it after the season,' that's what he's saying. His attitude is, 'The Oakland A's gave me an opportunity to fulfill a personal goal in college football and when it's complete, I'll return to my contractual commitment.'" Meanwhile the Red Sox have signed starting pitcher Nathan Eovaldi to a four-year contract that brings the free agent right-hander back to Boston, the team announced Thursday. Terms of the deal weren't divulged, but multiple reports peg it to be worth \$68 million. The New York Yankees reportedly were interested in Eovaldi but did not want to go past three years on a deal. "We're very happy to have Nathan back with us," Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said in a news release.

NHL

# Devils dump Kings, end six-game slide

Reuters  
Los Angeles

Kyle Palmieri scored two goals, and Taylor Hall contributed three assists on Thursday as the visiting New Jersey Devils ended a six-game losing streak with a 6-3 victory over the Los Angeles Kings.

Travis Zajac, Will Butcher, Nico Hischier and Blake Coleman also collected goals for New Jersey. The Devils scored more than three goals for the first time since a 5-2 victory over the Montreal Canadiens on Nov 21 that was their last win before Thursday.

Brendan Leipsic, who was claimed off waivers by the Kings from the Vancouver Canucks on Monday, scored his first goal in two games with his new team. Adrian Kempe and Kyle Clifford also scored for Los Angeles, which fell to an NHL-worst 1-16-1 when allowing the first goal in a game.

Palmieri scored two goals for the first time since he had two in each of the first three games of the season. Hall now has 11 points (three goals, eight assists) over his past seven games, but he remains one goal away from 200 in his NHL career.

Drew Doughty notched an assist on Kempe's second-period goal, giving him a Kings-record 334 assists for a defenseman, passing Rob Blake on the all-time list. The honour came in Doughty's 799th career game. Palmieri gave the Devils a 1-0 lead with a power-play goal at 13:49 of the opening pe-

**RESULTS**

Detroit	5-4	Toronto
Colorado	5-2	Florida
Columbus	4-3	Philadelphia
Pittsburgh	6-2	Islanders
Montreal	5-2	Ottawa
Tampa Bay	3-2	Boston
Calgary	2-0	Minnesota
Washington	4-2	Arizona
Vancouver	5-3	Nashville
Las Vegas	4-3	Chicago
New Jersey	6-3	Los Angeles

riod with his 13th tally of the year. Less than two minutes later, Leipsic tied the score 1-1 with his third goal of the season.

Zajac gave the Devils a 2-1 lead a mere 25 seconds into the second period. He scored his ninth goal unassisted when Kings goalie Jonathan Quick failed to clear the puck.

After Kempe scored for the Kings at 6:59 of the second period with his fourth, Palmieri gave the Devils a 3-2 lead at 10:57 when he scored from the left circle after drifting left and shooting right, catching Quick off balance. It was Palmieri's 14th goal of the season. Butcher scored an opportunistic goal at 12:28 of the second period, his second, when his long-distance shot was redirected into the goal by Kings defenseman Dion Phaneuf. Clifford cut the Devils' lead to 4-3 when he pounced on a poor clearance from Devils

goalie Keith Kinkaid for his fifth of the season. Hischier sealed the victory with just under nine minutes remaining when he scored his sixth goal of the season. Coleman added an empty-net goal, his ninth, with eight seconds remaining. Kinkaid made 29 saves as he improved to 4-0-0 lifetime against the Kings. It was just the third road victory of the season for New Jersey, which owns the league's worst road mark.

Quick also made 29 saves.

**BYRON SCORES TWICE, LEADS HABS OVER SENS**

Paul Byron scored two goals to lead the visiting Montreal Canadiens to a 5-2 victory over the Ottawa Senators on Thursday. Byron recorded his second multi-goal game of the season, with the first score coming in the aftermath of an Ottawa turnover 11:03 into the second period. Byron added an empty-net goal to put the game away 17:28 into the third period. Jeff Petry also had a two-point night with a goal and an assist for the Canadiens, while Andrew Shaw scored the 100th goal of his NHL career. Brendan Gallagher also scores for Montreal. Mark Stone and Colin White each recorded a goal and an assist for the Senators, who were undermanned for much of the game due to a pair of key injuries. Matt Duchene didn't return after sustaining a lower-body injury midway through the second period. Duchene appeared to be favouring his right leg on a non-contact rush down the ice and immediately headed to the locker room after the play ended.



New Jersey Devils right wing Kyle Palmieri (second left) celebrates with defenseman Will Butcher (left) centre Travis Zajac (right) and defenseman Ben Lovejoy (far right) as he scores against the Los Angeles Kings during the first period at Staples Center. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

LA LIGA

# Real face last-place Huesca in battle of large and little

Leaders Barcelona visit their Catalan rivals Espanyol today, while Atletico Madrid host Alaves

AFP  
Madrid

Luka Modric has been voted the best player on the planet and Real Madrid crowned European champions three times in a row but in Huesca today they will meet a team from the opposite end of the ladder. Madrid's stars gathered in Paris on Monday, dressed in shiny black suits and bow-ties, to watch their midfielder magician collect the Ballon d'Or, ahead of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo. "He is at his peak," Real coach Santiago Solari said. "That makes it even more beautiful."

From the Grand Palais on the Champs-Elysees, they head this weekend to northern Spain and Alcoraz, Huesca's recently-expanded stadium with a capacity of just over 7,000, in a town of little more than 52,000 people.

There, they face La Liga's bottom club, on seven points from 14 games, but Huesca's ascent began far lower down than that. The majority of their 58-year history has been spent between the third and fourth tiers. They were languishing in Segunda B as recently as 2015. Promoted to the top flight for the first time at the end of last season, Huesca prepared by overhauling their squad, but on a shoe-string budget, with a mix of players from the lower divisions, promising youngsters and old heads from abroad.

They changed coach too, twice, after Rubi was poached by Espanyol, who are now seventh. He was replaced by Leo Franco, who only lasted until October. Then in came Francisco, who is yet to see a victory. Some of the promotion team remained, including top scorer Alex Gallar.

He joined in 2017 after spells at Cultural Leonesa, Hercules, Cornella and Mallorca's B team, all four sides in the third tier. "When I came here, it was not the main objective to go up to the top flight but we did it," Gallar said. "It was a very good decision to come here."

One of his three goals this term came against Barcelona at the Camp Nou. Huesca scored twice there, including the opener, but Barca finished with eight. This, though, will be Huesca's first time hosting either of Spain's two



Real Madrid, who beat Valencia in the La Liga last weekend, are only five points behind leaders Barcelona. (AFP)

grandees and a chance for the fans to ponder on how far their team has come.

"We have seen people are behind us despite the results and pushes us to turn it around," Francisco said last week. "Our home has to be a fortress."

In the summer of 2013, Real Madrid bought Gareth Bale for a world record 100mn euros while Huesca signed seven players, all for nothing. Madrid are in good form and Bale, again, has a point

to prove. He came off in the second half of last weekend's win over Valencia, rubbing his thigh, while Santiago Solari said afterwards he was "exhausted".

It was Bale's tenth La Liga game without scoring, even if that run masks some decent performances under Solari, including two goals and an assist in the Champions League. "Bale is working well," Solari said on Wednesday. "He's fine." Real's victory over

Valencia, on the back of beating Roma in Italy, means the 3-0 defeat to Eibar following the international break seems more like a blip amid six wins from seven matches. Despite changing coach this season, a scoreless drought that lasted more than eight hours and being thrashed by Barcelona, Madrid are only five points off the top.

That they remain just about in touch is down to one of the most error-rid-

den title races in recent memory. Last weekend, Barca, Sevilla, Atletico Madrid and Alaves could all have finished the round in first but only two of the top six managed to win. Barcelona were one of them. On Saturday, Ernesto Valverde's side visit their Catalan rivals Espanyol. Atletico host Alaves, who have finished every weekend in the top six since round five. Sevilla are away to Valencia, a side that last season fin-

ished fourth but now sit 14th.

#### FIXTURES (ALL TIMES GMT)

**Today:** Atletico Madrid v Alaves (1200), Valencia v Sevilla (1515), Villarreal v Celta Vigo (1730), Espanyol v Barcelona (1945)

**Tomorrow:** Eibar v Levante (1100), Huesca v Real Madrid (1515), Real Sociedad v Real Valladolid (1730), Real Betis v Rayo Vallecano (2145)

## 21st Qatar National Arabian Horse Show



Daasah Al Shaqab was adjudged as the best horse in Class 3B category at the 21st Qatar National Arabian Horse Show at Al Shaqab's Indoor arena yesterday. Halima Al Khor finished second and Magidaa Al Rayyan third. The show will continue today, with tomorrow being the last day.



The show will continue today, with tomorrow being the last day.

## SPOTLIGHT

# PSG to snatch Ajax star De Jong from Man City in record 75mn euro deal: Report

AFP  
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain could pip Manchester City to the signing of Ajax and Netherlands midfielder star **Freddie de Jong** in a record 75 million euro deal, a Dutch newspaper report said yesterday. "It is almost certain that De Jong, 21, will exchange Ajax for Paris Saint-Germain," popular tabloid *De Telegraaf* said. If the deal goes through, it will be "the most expensive and sensational in the history of the Eredivisie and Ajax in particular," the newspaper added.

PSG's move to secure the talented midfielder, who made his debut for Ajax two years ago, comes after a lightning intervention from the club's technical directors Maxwell and Antero Henrique. Top PSG



officials met De Jong's agent Ali Dursun on Thursday and, later, Ajax management at the Johan Cruyff Arena, *De Telegraaf* said. Talks between Ajax and Manchester City are believed to have reached an advanced

stage after De Jong spent several hours talking to City manager Pep Guardiola.

But the English champions "wanted to do business at a later stage and PSG was lightning-quick to jump on the opportunity," claimed the report. "The dark blue jersey of France's upcoming champions PSG, not the light blue one of Manchester City, will almost certainly become De Jong's next summer," the paper said. Ajax confirmed to the Dutch daily that talks with PSG have been held, although the club added "there was no definitive agreement... other clubs have also shown interest".

The highest outgoing transfer amount paid so far in the Dutch top flight was last year when Colombian centre-back Davinson Sanchez moved from Ajax to Tottenham Hotspur for 40mn euros (\$45.5mn). In 2015 Memphis Depay moved from PSV to Manchester United for 34mn euros (\$38.6).

## FOCUS

# Coach Kovac halts Bayern rotation in bid

DPA  
Munich

Bayern Munich coach **Niko Kovac** will stop using squad rotation to the end of the year in a bid to end the Bundesliga champions' inconsistent form. "I have said, okay, rotation will happen but only if someone is injured or is really on the floor," Kovac said yesterday.

"The players not currently in the team will have to adapt to the new situation. This is certainly not pleasant but that's football," Kovac added. Bayern face Nuremberg today having not won at home in the league since mid-September.

They sit fourth in the table, nine points behind league



leaders Borussia Dortmund. But their last games included a 5-1 thrashing of Benfica in the Champions League and a 2-1 win away to Werder Bremen domestically. "The squad is known

— and the first eleven at the moment as well," said Kovac.

That means recently ill defender Mats Hummels and the injured James Rodriguez and Javi Martinez may have to wait to return to the side. "If a player then gets a chance, which he has to work for in training, he has to use it," Kovac said.

The 47-year-old boss also played down the prospect of rebuilding the squad significantly in the January transfer window. "The clubs who have to do something in winter have a big problem because the market is not so big," he said. Kovac branded prices in the coming window "astronomical" and that "we will — as of now — do nothing".

Canadian teenager Alphonso Davies has already been signed

by Bayern from the Vancouver Whitecaps in the North American MLS and is training with his new teammates. He will be eligible to play from January 1, 2019. Before the second half of the Bundesliga begins for Bayern, away to Hoffenheim on January 18, Bayern will attend a training camp in Qatar and take part in the Telekom Cup in Dusseldorf. Bayern said the men's team would go to Doha from January 4 to 10 before the Dusseldorf tournament on January 13.

The women's team at the club will also have a camp in Doha, January 27 to February 3, before their season begins against champions Wolfsburg on February 17. Bayern said the visit of the women's team will also "support women's sport in Arab countries."

PREMIER LEAGUE

# Gunners firing on all cylinders pose questions over Mesut Ozil's future

Even if Ozil is given green light to return there are no guarantees that Emery will pick the German

AFP  
London

**M**esut Ozil has missed Arsenal's last four matches and may be absent again when the Gunners host Huddersfield Town today. The 30-year-old playmaker is being treated for a back problem and manager Unai Emery has hinted that he could be passed fit if he comes through yesterday's sessions with the club's physiotherapist unscathed.

The German had been on the training ground on Thursday "running and touching the ball", Emery told a press conference. But even if Ozil is given the green light to return there are no guarantees that Emery will pick the club's highest earner, even for the bench. That despite being a World Cup winner in 2014, and a player with skills few others on the planet can reproduce, especially when it comes to setting up colleagues to score. Emery, it seems, had already decided he could do without the former Germany international in his comprehensive overhaul of a squad that had forgotten how to win trophies under previous manager Arsene Wenger.

It was the Frenchman who had sanctioned a salary-doubling, £350,000-a-week, three-year contract extension for Ozil just three months before stepping down as manager. Ozil's omission from the starting line-up at Bournemouth on November 25 was the big reveal to a world that could not fail to notice.

Emery's explanation could hardly be misinterpreted either: Ozil was named on the bench — and left there for the entire game — at Bournemouth because his manager felt he could not deal with the "physicality and intensity" of the Gunners' opponents.

Few failed to notice at the time that the reason for his omission carried little weight as Bournemouth are one of the least aggressive in the Premier League. His absence mattered little as the Gunners' unbeaten run simply carried on without him. The Gunners can take that to 21 matches against the Terriers with Ozil's return to the side likely to be delayed till they play Qarabag in the Europa League next week. Wenger, in his final season, used the competition to keep fresh fringe men he had decided not to employ in the Premier League even though three of them — England duo Theo Walcott and Jack Wilshere plus Olivier Giroud



Mesut Ozil is being treated for a back problem and manager Unai Emery has hinted that he could be passed fit if he came through yesterday's sessions unscathed.

of France — were internationals of experience and reputation.

Ozil is not the only world class player to suddenly find themselves unable to get into the starting elevens, Paul Pogba, Romelu Lukaku and ex-Gunner Alexis Sanchez falling foul of the volatile Jose Mourinho at Manchester United. Emery wants his players to work hard off the ball and attack with intensity with it and Ozil, for all his attributes, seems to tick neither of those boxes. Ozil's post-World Cup fall out with Germany cannot have helped either, coming at a time when every Arsenal player knew he had to impress the new man after years of inertia under Wenger.

The player felt he was the victim of both racism and disrespect because of his Turkish roots, claiming "I am German when we win, but I am an immigrant when we lose". Such sentiments were no doubt genuine and deserving of sympathy but Emery appears to care about one issue only: whether a player can thrive under his system. The answer to that, at the moment at least, appears to be no for Mesut Ozil.

**ARSENAL PLAYERS FILMED USING 'HIPPIY CRACK'**

Meanwhile, Arsenal said yesterday they will "remind players of their responsibilities" after a video emerged that appears to show a number of

players inhaling nitrous oxide. Players including Mesut Ozil, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, Alexandre Lacazette and Matteo Guendouzi feature in the footage, which appears to come from CCTV footage and was published by the Sun newspaper.

In a statement Arsenal said: "The players will be spoken to about this and reminded of their responsibilities as representatives of the club."

Nitrous oxide, also known as laughing gas or "hippy crack", is freely available although it is technically illegal to sell it for recreational purposes. In the video, which reportedly comes from a London venue shortly before the start of the current season, other Gunners

players including Henrikh Mkhitaryan can be seen rejecting the offer to use the gas.

The footage is the latest to show top players being linked with nitrous oxide. Raheem Sterling was warned by his then club Liverpool after footage emerged of him using the substance in 2015. In the same year, Jack Grealish was warned by the then Aston Villa manager, Tim Sherwood, after pictures emerged of him appearing to inhale the gas, and Saido Berahino was reprimanded by West Brom for a similar incident in 2014.

When an image was posted of then Tottenham player Kyle Walker in 2013, apologised on Twitter.

**Arsenal's Holding out for season after injury**

Arsenal defender Rob Holding is set to miss the rest of the season after the Premier League club announced he had sustained cruciate ligament damage. The 23-year-old suffered the knee injury during the first half of Wednesday's 2-2 draw with Manchester United at Old Trafford, which left Unai Emery's side fifth in the table. The rehabilitation process is expected to take between six to nine months, the club said. Holding began his career with Bolton before joining Arsenal in 2016. He has been a consistent member of the Gunners' back four, starting 15 games. He wrote on Twitter: "Just want to say a big thank you to all the fans, players and staff members for the support during the past couple of days. Gutted to get injured during a strong period for the team."

**England's Nobbs to miss Women's World Cup**

England and Arsenal midfielder Jordan Nobbs will miss next year's Women's World Cup in France after rupturing the anterior cruciate ligament in her left knee. Nobbs was taken off on a stretcher in Arsenal's 4-0 win over Everton in the Women's Super League last month and had been a crucial part of England manager Phil Neville's plans for the 2019 tournament. The 25-year-old, who has won two league titles with the north London club, had surgery on Monday and was ruled out for the rest of the season. Nobbs was part of the Lionesses squad that finished third at the 2015 World Cup in Canada, but missed most of the tournament because of a hamstring injury. England will learn who they will face in the group stage of the June to July tournament today.

**South Korea forward Kim Seung-dae out of Asian Cup**

South Korea forward Kim Seung-dae will miss the Asian Cup in the New Year because of a toe injury and has been replaced in the pre-tournament training camp by uncapped winger Kim In-sung. Kim Seung-dae has played five times for his country scoring one goal and his absence through injury is somewhat ironic given he played every minute of every game for his club Pohang Steelers in the recently-concluded season. Speedster Kim In-sung, who has never represented his country at any level, had a brief spell in the Russian Premier League with CSKA Moscow in 2011. South Korea are unbeaten in six games under new coach Paulo Bento.

**Ex-Italy boss Prandelli appointed Genoa coach**

Former Italy coach Cesare Prandelli was appointed coach of Serie A strugglers Genoa yesterday, a day after Ivan Juric was sacked following the club's Italian Cup exit to a third division side. The 61-year-old Prandelli will be officially presented by the northwestern port side today with his first game in charge at home against SPAL this weekend. Croatia Juric was appointed for a third time as Genoa coach in place of Davide Ballardini last October while the club were 11th in Serie A. Since then they have slumped to 14th and also exited the Italian Cup on Thursday losing 10-9 on penalties to Serie C side Virtus Entella after the match ended 3-3 after extra time.

SPOTLIGHT

## Southampton put on alert as new boss considers clear out

Reuters  
Southampton

**S**outhampton's floundering footballers have been put on alert by new manager Ralph Hasenhuettl, who has hinted a number of the squad will likely be shown the door in January. The former Red Bull Leipzig coach, appointed this week to save the Saints from relegation, indicated he would use the transfer window to offload some players who do not suit his high-energy style.

"I think the squad is very big," the former Austrian international striker told reporters. "So we have a lot of positions where we have too many players and maybe one or the other is leaving us and we bring something new. I have spoken with the chairman about that and they do everything to help my wishes."

Hasenhuettl is already building up a rapport with club chairman Ralph Krueger, who not only shares a first name with the coach but also can speak to him in his mother tongue German. Something that will have pleased Krueger in any language is that Hasenhuettl will not necessarily insist on plundering the transfer market for replacements, but will be happy to delve into Southampton's academy for talent.

"We have a very good youth



academy in this club and it's a goal for us to bring them forward again," the coach said. "In history there were a lot coming... out of the youth academy and that's the goal for the future. We want these guys to perform, to develop."

Southampton's academy has for some years been the envy of the Premier League, producing internationals including Gareth Bale, Theo Walcott, Adam Lallana and Luke Shaw, though the production line has slowed a little in the last 18 months.

Southampton languish in 18th place in the league, having narrowly avoided the drop last season thanks to the late-season efforts of managerial firefighter Mark Hughes, released by Saints after the weekend's 2-2 draw with Manchester United.

Hasenhuettl watched his new side's 3-1 defeat by Tottenham

Hotspur on Wednesday night before taking the reins, and his first match is at Cardiff today. "The first target is to get out of the relegation zone," he said. "It is tough with our schedule over Christmas. I am not frightened about it, but the problem is we have a lot of games in the coming days."

Southampton's next home game will be against Arsenal on Dec 16, before scraps with Huddersfield and West Ham, then league leaders Manchester City on Dec 30. The club starts the new year at Chelsea.

With just nine points from their opening 15 matches, Southampton are above bottom side Fulham and 19th-placed Burnley only on goal difference. A win today would see them leapfrog Cardiff, two places above them with two points more.

FOCUS

## Libertadores fan violence has damaged Argentina, says Boca coach

Reuters  
Madrid

**F**an violence surrounding the Copa Libertadores final has damaged Argentina and South America and overshadowed the achievements of Argentine football, Boca Juniors coach Guillermo Barros Schelotto said yesterday.

Boca and fierce Argentine rivals River Plate will play each other in Madrid tomorrow in the second leg of the final of the Libertadores, South America's equivalent of the Champions League. River drew 2-2 with arch-rivals Boca in the first leg on Nov 11 but the return has been moved from Buenos Aires to Spain after Boca players were injured when fans attacked their team coach shortly before the match at River's Monumental stadium on Nov 24.

With Madrid police mounting the biggest ever security operation for a football game in the city, attention has turned to the risk of violence between the two bitter Argentine rivals, with the match itself taking a back seat. "Today we should be talking about how River and Boca are putting Argentina on the highest pedestal possible and instead we are talking about violence instead of what the teams have achieved this season," Schelotto said yesterday. "Unfortunately, we haven't learned from the same errors we have made before and we have ended up damaging Argentina and South America."

The attack on Boca's bus last month was far from an isolated incident in Argentine football, and recalled events from a 2015 Libertadores game between the two sides when River players were attacked with pepper spray. Argentine campaign group 'Sal-



Boca Juniors coach Guillermo Barros Schelotto speaks at a press conference. (AFP)

vamos Al Futbol' (Save Football) says that a total of 328 people have died at football matches and 92 of those deaths have occurred in the last decade.

Schelotto said the fact that the game had to be moved to Europe should serve as a turning point in the fight to halt football violence. "What happened two weeks ago happens a lot in Argentina and South America but I think it will have to change because if you cannot play Boca versus River in Argentina it's very worrying," said Schelotto, who won four Libertadores titles with Boca as a player.

"It's the right time to take measures and start to show an example. We need time, we need games of this quality to be played in Argentina or South America and to show that we have matured. It's the time to take measures and start to show an example."

Meanwhile, nearly 4,000 police and private security guards will be deployed in Madrid for the "high-risk" Copa Libertadores final, the government said Friday. More than

2,000 national police will deploy around the Santiago-Bernabeu stadium. That is more than for the last Champions League final in the 81,000-seat stadium in 2010 when national police deployed a 1,400-strong force.

It is also more than the 1,500 police officers deployed for the "clasico" game between rivals Real Madrid and Barcelona that took place under high security five days after the 2015 Paris attacks. Apart from national police officers, 1,700 private security guards will be used by Real Madrid, which owns the stadium.

Rodriguez said some 200 to 300 "particularly violent" supporters from each team had been identified by Spanish and Argentinian authorities, but if was unclear whether they were in Madrid or not. He added that supporters found to have a "serious" criminal record could be sent straight back to Argentina if they came to Madrid. Between 5,500 and 6,000 out of 10,000 tickets for supporters living in Argentina have been sold, Rodriguez said.

## PREMIER LEAGUE

# Guardiola warns City against complacency

Guardiola's unbeaten leaders visit Chelsea today sitting two points clear of Liverpool

AFP  
Manchester, United Kingdom

**P**ep Guardiola has warned his Manchester City players that complacency is the biggest threat to their push for domestic and European domination. Guardiola's unbeaten Premier League leaders visit Chelsea today sitting two points clear of closest challengers Liverpool.

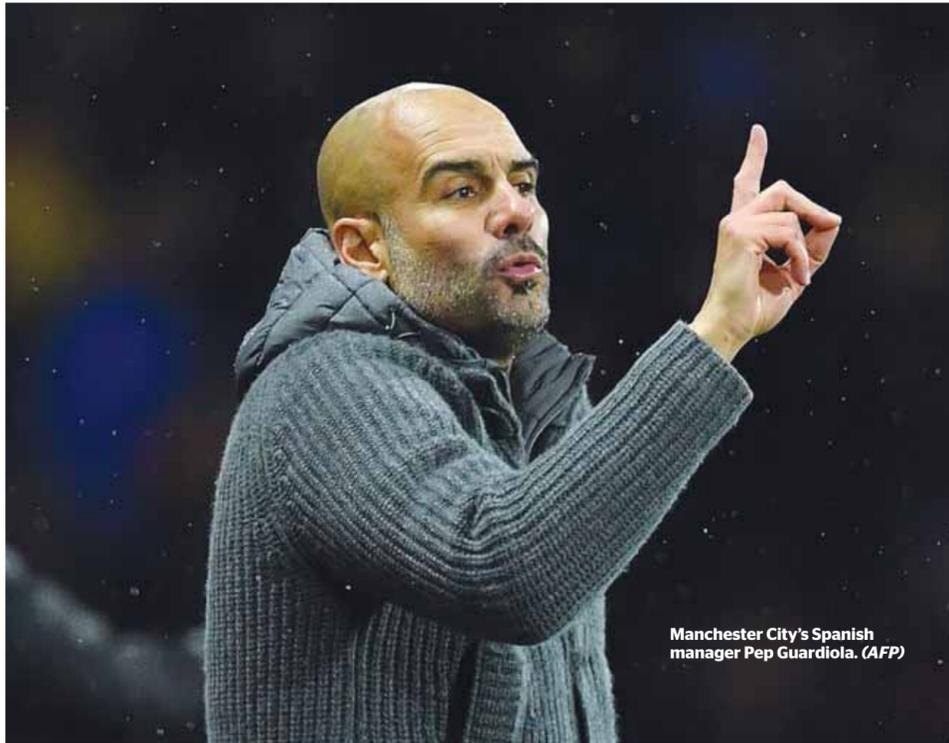
City are well on course to defend the title they won with 100 points in May and are also through to the last 16 of the Champions League with a game to spare. They have managed all of that largely without the services of last season's club player of the year Kevin De Bruyne.

City must also go to London without top scorer Sergio Aguero, who has missed the past two matches with an adductor muscle strain. Guardiola, who says he does not care about the possibility of City going through the entire league season unbeaten, has told his players that maintaining their standards is the key to success.

"The biggest danger to us is basically to think that it's not necessary to improve," he said. "I see my team and many things are good but still we can be better. I am proud that we have been consistent for most of the past 15 or 16 months, playing every three days. That's the most difficult thing to achieve in all sports. It's a big compliment for the players. But I tell them every game that there are many things we can do better, but we could have dropped two points in the final 10 minutes at Watford on Tuesday."

Chelsea head coach Maurizio Sarri has suggested that Manchester City are the best team in Europe but Guardiola has dismissed that claim. According to the City manager, his team need to win the Champions League before they can be classed as the continent's best.

Chelsea have lost their past two away league matches, at Tottenham and Wolves, but Sarri is taking them in the right direction, according to former Bar-



Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola. (AFP)

celona boss Guardiola. "The job he has done so far is excellent," he said. "People don't know how difficult it is to play in a special way. He needs time. Their past two away games were so difficult and things like this can happen. But during pre-season we played them in the Community Shield at Wembley and they were already his team. Maybe they are not playing consistently for 90 minutes but when they play well for 50 to 70 minutes, they are excellent."

Guardiola has played down the likelihood of City matching the Arsenal side of 2003-04 by going through a whole Premier League season unbeaten, arguing that it is less important to him than the quality of his team's performances.

City managed a run of 22 league games unbeaten from the start of last season, winning 20 of them, before falling to a 4-3 defeat at Liverpool in January.

Arsenal are one of only two teams to go through an entire English top-flight sea-

son without defeat.

#### FIXTURES (1500 GMT UNLESS STATED)

**Today:** Bournemouth v Liverpool (1230), Arsenal v Huddersfield, Burnley v Brighton, Cardiff v Southampton, Manchester United v Fulham, West Ham v Crystal Palace, Chelsea v Manchester City (1730), Leicester v Tottenham (1945)

**Tomorrow:** Newcastle v Wolves (1600)

**On Monday:** Everton v Watford (2000)

## SARRI ADMITS HE EXPECTED CHALLENGES AT CHELSEA



**London:** Maurizio Sarri said he knew he would face challenges at Chelsea despite a bright start to the season as he prepares his team to face Premier League leaders Manchester City today. Chelsea were unbeaten in their first 12 Premier League games but lost 2-1 at Wolves on Wednesday — their second defeat in their past three league games.

Those dropped points have left them in fourth place, 10 points adrift of leaders City after 15 games. "I knew very well that sooner or later we have to face difficulties," Sarri said. "When you change the way of playing, the way of football, you need to change the mentality. You need to change the mentality in 25 minds, so it's not a short way. It's very difficult."

Pep Guardiola's City have won 13 of

their Premier League games and are unbeaten in the league since April. Sarri, who has experienced defeat to Guardiola with Napoli and Chelsea in August's Community Shield, was asked how his side can beat City. "I don't know," he said. "Against Guardiola I lost every match, so I don't know. You have to ask somebody else."

Sarri accused his Chelsea players of a collective "blackout" at the first sign of trouble against Fulham, despite a 2-0 win, and against Wolves. The Italian said: "We have a problem to manage the match at the moment. In the last two matches we played well for 55, 60 minutes, then (after) the first difficulty we suffered a blackout."

"In the first match (against Fulham) we were lucky because they didn't score. In the last match (at Wolves)

we were a little bit unlucky. For the opponents, five shots, only two on target. We conceded two goals."

Sarri struggled to explain the reason for the lapses. "It's not really very easy to answer," he said. "We didn't react as a team, as 11 players. In 11 different ways. So it's a big problem. We were not able to have the right determination to win the match."

City, who finished 30 points better off than Chelsea last season, are the best team in Europe, Sarri said, and that is his target for the Blues. "At the moment they are stronger than us but our final target is to be the best team in Europe," he said. "We need to work, we need to improve. In 90 minutes anything can happen. We know it's very difficult but we have to believe in it."

## QNB STARS LEAGUE

## Umm Salal, Al Arabi aim for victory before winter break

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**U**mm Salal take on Al Arabi in the QNB Stars League today at the Al Gharafa stadium. Al Arabi are seventh in the standings with 18 points, while Umm Salal are close behind, in eighth with 17 points.

Both teams will be keen to end their campaign on a winning note before the QNB Stars League takes a long break with this match. The tournament will resume only after the Asian Cup in the UAE in January next year.

Umm Salal played out a goalless draw with Al Ahli, whereas Al Arabi defeated Al Kharaitiyat 2-1 in Week 14. Al Arabi coach Hatem al-Moaddeb said that they were eager to go into the break with a positive result against Umm Salal while admitting the latter are a fighting unit. "After our victory over Al Kharaitiyat last week, the mood in our team camp is upbeat as we head for the Umm Salal game before the league takes a long break. While underlining the fact that our players are staying confident, I must admit that Umm Salal are formidable competitors who have put up some incredible displays this season. Their performance against Al Ahli in the last round was an example," said al-Moaddeb.

"We have a lot of confidence in our players even when we lose. We are looking forward to entering the break in high spirit. It is possible if we come out with a positive result against Umm Salal. We need to keep performing well. We are optimistic and confident," he added. Al Arabi will be without Mailson Farias due to suspension.

Meanwhile, Umm Salal's assistant coach Bouziane Ben Arabi said the three points from this game would make his players comfortable and motivated during the long winter break. "We played a tactically-strong game against Al Ahli in the last round though it ended in a goalless draw. The reality is that Umm

Salal deserve a better position," he said. "The three points from the Al Arabi game before the break will mean a lot to us. It will make the players comfortable and motivate everyone, especially since the winter break is going to be long this time around," Bouziane added.

Umm Salal will mainly be served by Yannick Sagbo, Mahmoud a-Mawas and Ismail Mahmoud, while they will miss the services of injured Moroccan defender Adil Rhaili.

Umm Salal will certainly be wary of Al Arabi, given that they suffered a 1-5 loss when the teams faced off in the first leg.

In today's opening match, Al Khor, who are in dire need of points as they face high-flying Al Saliya. Al Khor are 11th in the standings with nine points, only behind bottom-placed Al Kharaitiyat. Al Saliya are fifth currently and will go to third if they win today. Al Khor drew 1-1 with Al Shahania, while Al Saliya lost to Qatar SC 0-1 in the last round. Al Khor will be aiming for full points so that they can take the long break after this week's action in a good frame of mind as they are also in the danger zone.

Al Khor will have to be at their best if they are to restrict Al Saliya from bagging full points as the latter will be strengthened by the return of strikers Rachid Tiberkanine and Abdelkader Ilyas. On the other hand, Al Saliya will have to be back on winning ways if they are to stay in the top four. Al Rayyan and Al Ahli are close behind them with one and two points less respectively. Al Saliya had beaten Al Khor 2-1 in the first leg.

Al Khor coach Bernard Casoni said: "Al Saliya are a good team that includes players of the highest level. They are a well-organised side and their third place in the rankings makes it difficult for us. Despite the difficulty of the confrontation, we have the desire to win and win the three points. Our task is not easy. The confrontation is arduous. We have to be good in the defence and offence."



Al Arabi players train ahead of the Umm Salal clash yesterday.

## FOCUS

## Defending champ al-Sulaiti and al-Khelaifi start new season in style

**Q**atar Superstock 600 and Qatar Touring Car Championship kicked off yesterday with the qualifying sessions as defending champions Saeed al-Sulaiti and Abdullah al-Khelaifi took pole positions. In Qatar Superstock 600, al-Sulaiti took the first pole of the season at the Losail International Circuit after clocking fastest time of 2:04.438.

Al-Sulaiti will start the race in the first row, ahead of compatriot Mashel al-Naimi, who posted the second best time of 2:05.296 and Abdullah al-Qubaisi will start in third position in the grid with a time of 2:05.321. "I am really happy to be in first position in today sessions and get the Superpole. Compared to last week in the official test, I feel much better with the injury in my finger. I didn't expect to be in front with this lap time. Of course, the race will be difficult tomorrow with 12 laps and I believe there will be a good fight between Abdullah, Mishal and myself so let's see tomorrow," said al-Sulaiti.

Although al-Naimi couldn't fix the problems with the front tyre from last week, he was satisfied with his second position. "Overall I am happy with this result. I managed to find a good set up in the Superpole with the used tyre but still have some problem with the front tyre as it happened last week during the official practice. Tomorrow in the warm up we will try to do something different in the front fork," said al-Naimi.



Abdullah al-Khelaifi and Saeed al-Sulaiti (right) in action at the Losail International Circuit yesterday.

In the QSTK Trophy, the fastest rider was Jassim al-Thani with a time of 2:09.293 with Kuwaiti rider Mohammed al-Zaidan and Hassan al-Mansoori in second and third place respectively in their category. "For me, the new season is a new beginning. I started with a good timing, I trained very well in the off-season and I am ready to compete for the win. For tomorrow, I will start in a good position and I will try to keep this place and hopefully compete with QSTK riders," al-Thani said.

In the Qatar Touring Car Championship, the defending champion Abdullah al-Khelaifi driving a new car managed to secure the pole position with a lap time of 2:25.368 secs.

"I am very happy to be back. I have a new car for this championship and after the free practice, I had minor issues that were solved luckily and now I am ready to race. There is still a small set up to be done for tomorrow but even with this, I managed to qualify first. But I have to work hard as the newcomers

are very strong. They are here to win, so it will be a really tough race," said al-Khelaifi.

A total of 12 cars took part in the first round and the new drivers proved to be very strong. Ahmed Alasiri finished second with a lap time of 2:26.548, while Nasser al-Ahbabii ended in third place with a time of 2:28.066.

For Alasiri, this is his first time in the championship and was pleased with his debut. "The competition is fierce. Even though I qualified second, the other



drivers were very close so it will be very hard tomorrow but fun as well. This is my first time in a championship and first time with this car as I didn't take part in the official practice last week, so I am very happy with today's result and looking forward for tomorrow's race," said Alasiri.

Another debutant al-Ahbabii was also happy with his day's work. "This is my first time in this championship and I am so excited. I am very happy to

qualify in third place and for tomorrow, I will work with some set up in my tyres and steering and hopefully I can fight for the podium," said al-Ahbabii.

Today, QSTK Race 1 starts at 11:30 and Race 2 at 14:30. The QTCC first race is scheduled at 13:00 and the second at 16:00. Qatar Superstock 600 and Qatar Touring Car Championship are organised by Losail Circuit Sports Club and Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation with Pirelli Qatar as sponsor.