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TENNIS / QATAR TOTAL OPEN

# Kvitova shines as seeds ease through to next round

Wimbledon champion Muguruza picks up second-round victory; Konta, Georges post straight sets wins

By Sahar Bidappa  
Doha

The seeds were hardly made to sweat as Garbine Muguruza, Petra Kvitova, Julia Georges and Johanna Konta all won their matches convincingly at the Qatar Total Open yesterday.

The stand out victory of the day at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex, though, came from Kvitova. The former World No.1 has had a busy couple of weeks, winning her 21st title at the St. Petersburg Ladies Trophy followed by two Fed Cup wins for Czech Republic in Prague over the weekend.

In fact, Kvitova arrived in Doha only on Monday night, but that hardly seemed to come in the way of two-time Wimbledon champion cruising to the second round.

If anything, she seemed to be in a rush to catch up on some sleep as she dispatched wildcard Cagla Buyukakcay of Turkey 6-0, 6-3 in less than an hour. Kvitova is coming into the season after a horrific knife attack just over a year ago, where her left hand was injured badly.

Kvitova is currently ranked 21st and is seeded 16th in Doha, but she looks to be in fine form as the 27-year-old mounts a comeback to the top of the rankings. Yesterday's victory was Kvitova's eighth in a row as she pummelled 34 winners on the centre court.

Buyukakcay could only watch as Kvitova lost just four points out of a total 28 played in the first set that lasted just 19 minutes. Buyukakcay made a valiant comeback in the second set, twice exchanging breaks with Kvitova, but the Czech star proved too strong, converting six of her seven break-point opportunities and hitting four aces to close out the match in 56 minutes.

"I've gotten some sleep, just a little bit. I'm happy to be here; it was definitely a tough schedule for me, but getting an eighth win is something really nice for me. It's been super, really long since I've had such a good run. I'm just trying to continue with that," said Kvitova, who next

faces former World No. 2 Agnieszka Radwanska of Poland.

On her five-month forced injury hiatus in 2017, Kvitova said: "It was my biggest motivation to be back playing on the tennis court, competing against the best players. The dream came true, so I'm happy to be in the draw again."

Fourth seed Muguruza too seemed to be taking Kvitova's route until she was stretched by Duan Ying-Ying of China in the closing stages of the match.

Duan saved eight match points but Muguruza was still too strong for the Chinese as she cruised to a 6-3, 6-4 second-round victory. Muguruza was playing her first event since a surprise second round loss to Hsieh Su-Wei at the Australian Open.

"It's been a while since I am not competing, and I played her actually recently in the US Open, and we had a tough match, and today was quite similar, especially at the end," Muguruza said. "It was very interesting. She was playing better, and took me a lot of match points, but it was just an exciting end," she added.

No.10 seed Konta of Britain let out a huge roar on Court No.1 after she knocked out American qualifier Bernarda Pera 7-6 (5), 6-1 in her first round match. Konta had suffered a shock defeat to World No.113 Pera at the Australian Open second round last month and the Brit enjoyed avenging that loss yesterday.

"I'm very happy to have come through that," she said. "I knew going into the match that it was going to be tough, and it was actually similar conditions as it was in Melbourne, although it's a lot windier today than it was in Melbourne. It makes it quite tricky to play against her, so I'm very happy to have fought through that and dealt with the quick turnaround coming here from Fed Cup as well. That was a good challenge for me, and I'm just excited that I get to play again tomorrow," added Konta, who will take on Carla Suarez Navarro today.

The 2016 champion Suarez Navarro came back from a set down to beat Ukraine's Kateryna Bondarenko 3-6, 6-3, 6-3.



Spain's Garbine Muguruza in action against Duan Ying-Ying of China during their Qatar Total Open second round match at Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex yesterday. PICTURES: Jayan Orma

Meanwhile, ninth seed Julia Georges played a near-flawless first set to storm past Lucie Safarova winning 6-1, 7-5 in just 66 minutes.

In other results, 11th seed Madison Keys of the US defeated Wang Qiang 6-1, 6-4 of China, while 13th seed Anastasija Sevastova recorded a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Donna Vekic.

Romanian Fed Cup teammates Irina-Camelia Begu and Sorana Cirstea had mixed fortunes, with Begu falling to Samantha Stosur, 6-4, 6-2 and Cirstea defeating Maria Sakkari, 6-2, 6-3.

Fourteenth seed Magdalena Rybarikova saw off Omani wildcard Fatma al-Nabhani, 6-3, 6-1, and Carina Witthoef won the all-German clash with Tatjana Maria, 6-3, 6-0. Alize Cornet defeated Anett Kontaveit, 6-2, 6-1, while qualifier Marketa Vondrousova posted a 6-3, 6-1 win over Yulia Putintseva.



Britain's Johanna Konta in action against Bernarda Pera of the USA yesterday.

## Results, Order of Play

RESULTS	
<b>SINGLES</b>	6-3, 6-1
<b>Second round</b>	14-Magdalena Rybarikova (SVK) bt (WC) Fatma al Nabhani (OMA) 6-3, 6-1
4-Garbine Muguruza (ESP) bt (Q) Ying-Ying Duan (CHN) 6-3, 6-4	Samantha Stosur (AUS) bt Irina-Camelia Begu (ROU) 6-4, 6-2
<b>First round</b>	12-Madison Keys (USA) bt Qiang Wang (CHN) 6-1, 6-4
11-Kristina Mladenovic (FRA) bt Chuai peng (CHN) 6-2, 6-4	Carina Witthoef (GER) bt Tatjana Maria (GER) 6-3, 6-0
16-Petra Kvitova (CZE) bt (WC) Carla Buyukakcay (TUR) 6-0, 6-3	Serana Cirstea (ROU) bt Maria Sakkari (GRE) 6-2, 6-3.
10-Johanna Konta (GBR) bt (Q) Bernarda Pera (USA) 7-6 (5), 6-1	<b>DOUBLES (1st round)</b>
Alize Cornet (FRA) bt Anett Kontaveit (EST) 6-2, 6-1	7-Hao-Ching Chan (TPE)/Zhaoxuan Yang (CHN) bt Oksana Kalashnikova (GEO)/Lidziya Marpava (BLR) 6-1, 4-6, 10-2
13-Anastasija Sevastova (LAT) bt Donna Vekic (CRO) 6-3, 6-4	Gabriela Dabrowski (CAN)/Jelena Ostapenko (LAT) bt Nicole Melichar (USA)/Kveta Peschke (CZE) 4-6, 6-1, 10-8.
(Q) Marketa Vondrousova (CZE) bt Yulia Putintseva (KAZ)	

## TODAY'S ORDER OF PLAY

**CENTRE COURT (Starts at 12:00 noon)**  
Elina Svitolina (UKR) vs Marketa Vondrousova (CZE)  
Agnieszka Radwanska (POL) vs Petra Kvitova (CZE)  
Ekaterina Makarova (RUS) vs Simona Halep (ROU)  
Caroline Wozniacki (DEN) vs Carina Witthoef (GER)  
**Not Before 7pm**  
Karolina Pliskova (CZE) vs Alize Cornet (FRA)  
Mihaela Buzarnescu (ROU) vs Jelena Ostapenko (LAT)

**COURT 1 (from 3:30pm)**  
Anna Blinkova (RUS) vs Kristina Mladenovic (FRA)  
Julia Georges (GER) vs B Strycova (CZE)  
Samantha Stosur (AUS) vs Angelique Kerber (GER)

**COURT 2**  
Catherine Bellis (USA) vs Madison Keys (USA)  
Johanna Konta (GBR) vs Carla Suarez Navarro  
Monica Niculescu (ROU) vs Magdalena Rybarikova (SVK)

**COURT 3**  
Anastasija Sevastova (LAT) vs Naomi Osaka (JPN)  
Elise Mertens (BEL) vs Sorana Cirstea (ROU)

BOTTOMLINE

# Taking positives from Australian Open, says Halep

By Sahar Bidappa  
Doha

The smile is back on **Simona Halep's** face. The Romanian shed a few tears after the heart-breaking loss in the final of the Australian Open to Caroline Wozniacki last month. But a three-week break from the game seems to have given Halep time to overcome the agonising defeat at Melbourne Park.

Halep not just lost her No. 1 ranking to Wozniacki in the aftermath of the Australian Open defeat, she is now 0-3 in major single finals and has lost all of them in three sets.

Every time she thought she was closer to realising her Grand Slam dream, the 27-year-old has seen the trophy slip away.

In the 2014 French Open final, Halep lost 6-4, 6-7 (5), 6-4 to Maria Sharapova, while a free-swinging unseeded 20-year-old Jelena Ostapenko from Latvia came back from the brink of defeat to win 4-6, 6-4, 6-3, in last year's French Open final. Halep was up, 3-1, in the final set be-

fore dropping the final five games.

The Australian Open loss was equally a hard pill to swallow for Halep. She had saved match points in two matches - in the third round against the unseeded American Lauren Davis and in the titanic semi-final against former No. 1 Angelique Kerber.

But an ankle injury and a determined Wozniacki, who herself was chasing her maiden Slam - shattered Halep's dream in a 2-hour-49-minute final played on a sweltering Australian summer.

Now in Doha for the Qatar Total Open, after a much-needed break to her bruised body and recovering from mental fatigue, Halep is ready to restart her season. Having had time to reflect her Australian Open loss, she even said "everything was beautiful at that tournament!"

"It was really nice to see that the people appreciated the way I fought and the way I played," Halep said yesterday at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex.

"They also appreciated my speech, which I was a little bit surprised because I didn't feel that it was something special. But it was nice.



Everything was beautiful at that tournament, even if I lost the final, I took only the positives and I'm really motivated to go ahead. So everything was really good for me. Also the game, I changed a little bit, so I want just to keep it, and now just to play every match like there. But I will be careful with my health, of course," she added.

Halep was back on court practising only last week and hopes that her ankle and foot is ready for match play for the upcoming hard-court tournaments.

"The foot is okay now, but I have just to play an official match to see if it stays like that. I really

hope that nothing will come back and I will be able to play," Halep said. "My mind is set on the health first. I have to be very sure that the foot is okay and I can push. I'm ready because I practised a few days. I practised today. I will practice again today here. So I feel that I'm ready to play, but tomorrow I will see exactly how it is."

A champion here in Doha in 2014, Halep will open her campaign today against Russia's Ekaterina Makarova, against whom she has won her last two complete matches. For Halep, the next five days also presents an opportunity to reclaim her No. 1 ranking.

Seeded second, the Romanian must make the quarter-finals to have a chance to unsettle Wozniacki. If both Halep and Wozniacki advance to the quarter-finals then Halep will need to go one round further than the Dane to overtake her. The two can only meet in the final, and it would be quite a title clash if both women manage to come out unscathed till that stage.

"Everyone from Top 10 is able to win any tournament and any match," Halep said, not looking far ahead of herself. "So I'm just ready to face anyone, and I'm just focusing on myself be-

cause if you pay attention to yourself, it's much better. You don't get distracted by anything. Just do your job on court."

At the Australian Open, Halep also made news for playing without a clothing sponsor after her Adidas contract had expired. The red dress she wore during the tournament was something she designed in a hurry, which was then hand-sewn by a seamstress in China. It became a social media joke, with Halep saying in jest that she had ordered her dress online.

Yesterday, however she was all smiles as she revealed that she had signed a deal with Nike, which the Romanian media reported to be worth \$2 million a year. Some money earned from that deal might go to shopping in Doha!

"Well, for sure the shopping," Halep said when asked what she liked about Doha. "And I have already planned something. It's a nice city. The weather is perfect this period, and also the people are very nice with me. So I enjoy the time here," she added.

Halep might like Doha even more if she goes on to lift the Qatar Total Open title this Sunday and wrestle back the No. 1 ranking.

FOCUS

# Dodgeball makes foray into Qatar on National Sport Day

'The great thing about Qatar is that we embrace sports as part of our community'



Supreme Committee of Delivery and Legacy (SC) secretary-general Hassan al-Thawadi (right) with World Dodgeball Association president Tom Hickson during the National Sport Day celebrations at Aspire Park yesterday. PICTURES: Jayaram

By Mikhil Bhat  
Doha

Supreme Committee of Delivery and Legacy (SC) secretary-general Hassan al-Thawadi has said that the National Sport Day (NSD) has spurred the participation of people in sporting activities across the country.

"The great thing about Qatar is that we embrace sports as part of our community. I think there is always room for new sports," he said.

"Since the inception (of NSD), there has been a huge spike in participation across various sporting disciplines. Sports that were considered traditional in a certain way but participating in it wasn't, now there is room and opportunity for people to do so. Cycling, marathons, jiu-jitsu, combat sports, rugby, have all taken off. They have launched dodgeball today, there is definitely going to be involvement in it."

And so, World Dodgeball Association (WDA), with an eye on becoming "the most accessible sport on the planet",

made a foray into Qatar, with the launch of Qatar Dodgeball Federation yesterday.

WDA, according to its president Tom Hickson, has partnered with Ministry of Culture and Sport, and Aspire Zone Foundation to help lay the foundations in the country for a sport that many had heard of through a 2004 comedy movie starring Vince Vaughn and Ben Stiller.

The movie, understandably so, may not be an accurate portrayal of the sport, but in reality, dodgeball will see its share of glamour and eyeballs when the 2018 edition of the World Cup is hosted at the famed Madison Square Garden in New York City in August.

"The top 10 teams in the world, across three categories – men, women and mixed – will be participating in the tournament, with current champions, England (men and mixed) and Australia (women), granted automatic entries," Hickson said.

Teams have qualified for the tournament through continental qualifying tournaments in 2017. African qualifiers were held in Cairo, Asian in Kuala Lumpur, Americas in Washington, DC, and European in Glasgow.



Children take part in a dodgeball demonstration at Aspire Park yesterday.

## Basic WDA dodgeball rules

**Number of players:** Six players a side on court. Squads of 12, can interchange between sets

**Court:** 17m x 8m

**Balls:** Five balls (diameter 7 inches) in play at any given point in time. The balls are placed on the half line of the court. The opening act is also called a 'rush', which involves players from each team rushing towards the centre to pick up two balls for each side. The challenge is the fifth ball, which is placed in the centre, and the teams generally place their fastest sprinter in the middle to ensure they have the majority of the balls in possession to start with.

**Time:** 30-minute matches, 3-minute sets, 15 minute halves.

**Gameplay:** Throw the ball, if it hits the opponent without bouncing on the floor, the player is out of the match. If a player throws the ball, and the opposing team's player catches the ball, then the player who threw the ball is out of the match. Also, the player who catches the ball has the opportunity of bringing a teammate back into the match.

You can score a point, by sending out every player of the opposing team within a three-minute set. Or the team that has more members on the court at the end of a set, scores a point. At the end of 30 minutes, the team with most points wins.

Yesterday, the Englishman was at the Aspire Park, talking to visitors, kids, media and officials, hosting demo sessions alongside.

"Qatar has some magnificent aspirations around wanting to engage in community sport. Secondly, there are sporting opportunities that dodgeball offers in terms of accessibility, resonates with cultural values here in Qatar, and it's really about an opportunity for everyone to take part in a community friendly sport. That's why we are here on the National Sport Day," Hickson told *Gulf Times*.

The 32-year-old, who helped establish the world governing body a little more than four years ago, explained the process of establishing a federation.

"So we have three main stages – grassroots, competition, high performance. When you get to competitive elements, the international rules guide of the WDA will apply. But at grassroots, it's about engaging with people,

not about being rigid around rules and regulations, it's about accessibility," he said.

The Qatar federation, he said, comprises eight people at the moment, including board members and grassroots coaches. "Ramy Ramzy is the current head coach and executive board member, who is a national level qualified coach. He is responsible for making sure that the grassroots programme, from the strategic point of view, is embedded across the country," Hickson said.

The others involved from WDA are Singapore's Emmanuel Tan, world body's current Africa and Middle East continental manager Hany Nabil, and Hickson himself.

"We are looking at Qatar from the global partnership perspective, a potential of being based out of here in the future," Hickson said.

"At the moment we are focused on establishing new dodgeball activities, whether that's in schools, universities, colleges, in places of work or sports clubs. We want to make sure that grassroots dodgeball is available everywhere."

## TENNIS / NEW YORK OPEN

### Harrison denies wrongdoing after clash with Young

Reuters  
New York

Ryan Harrison has denied any wrongdoing after comments by fellow American Donald Young following their stormy first-round clash at the New York Open on Monday.

The two players had a heated debate at a change of ends during the match won by world number 44 Harrison, with the umpire intervening to calm the situation.

Following his 6-3, 7-6 (4) defeat Young took to Twitter to offer his views on what had happened.

"I'm shocked and disappointed, Ryan Harrison, to hear you tell me how you really feel about me as a black tennis player in the middle of our NY match.

"I thought this was supposed to be an inclusive gentleman's sport," the 28-year-old world number 65 said. Young did not elaborate on what

was actually said between the pair, but Harrison was quick to respond.

"The accusations made by Donald Young tonight following our match are absolutely untrue," he said on Twitter.

"I'm extremely disappointed that someone would say this in reaction to a lost tennis match. Any video/audio will 100 percent clear me and I encourage anyone with the available resources to find it."

Straight after the match Harrison gave an interview in which he said any bad feeling had been in the heat of the moment.

"At the end of the day, you see everybody, you like everybody and you want to be friends and friendly with everybody, but everybody out here I compete against, even the ones I like, they are the ones trying to take away my livelihood," he said.

"I have to do what I can to get through, and I was proud of myself for doing that."

TENNIS

### Breaks, lighter schedules can help players improve, says Federer

Reuters  
Bengaluru

Swiss ace Roger Federer believes he has benefited from a lighter schedule and says players should not be afraid of taking breaks from tennis to improve their game.

The 36-year-old was sidelined for a significant period in 2016 with a knee injury and upon his return in 2017, Federer competed in just 12 tournaments and the move appears to have paid off.

Federer, who stormed to his 20th major title at the Australian Open last month, says he understands the demands of the sport after playing a full schedule for over 15 years and believes that players can improve from intervals.

"You can always play more if you want to," Federer told the *Guardian* newspaper.

"You can always play less if you want to. I just hope people don't think that what I'm doing at 36 they can start doing at 25. I played full schedule from 1998 or 1999 to 2016. Until I was injured. "My philosophy is I play when I'm ready... What I did last year

– and what Rafa (Nadal) is doing also – is maybe a bit of a lighter schedule, and it shows to others by working or practising a bit more... you become a different or better player."

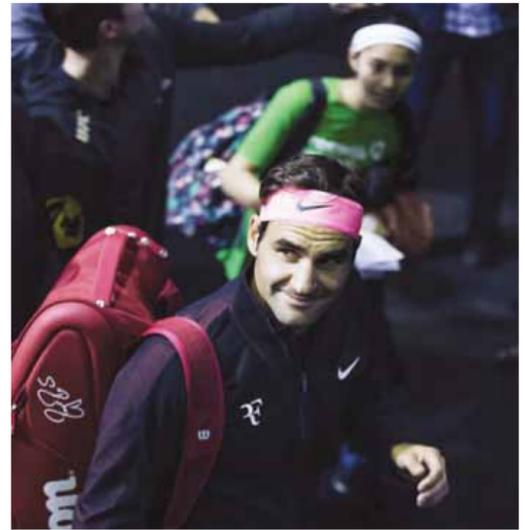
World number one Nadal, who evenly split the four grand slam titles with Federer last season, also had a similar lay-off in 2016 with a wrist problem and came back stronger to take his major title tally to 16.

"Say I go out for six months and I only work on my serve-and-volley game. I feel like I'd be a different player six months later but everybody's scared to do it..." Federer added.

"I hope I take that fear away a little bit, that sometimes it's OK to take time. That would be a wish for me: that players would read something into that – not that they just start doing it because the top guys are doing it.

"We're doing it because we're older and we have thousands of matches in our bodies. That's why we have to do it this way."

Federer is set to play Belgian Ruben Bemelmans in the opening round of the ABN Amro World Tennis event in Rotterdam today and is in contention to reclaim the top spot in rankings.



Switzerland's Roger Federer looks on during a training session at the ABN AMRO World Tennis Tournament in Rotterdam on Monday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

### Runner-up Goffin makes flying start in Rotterdam

DPA  
Rotterdam

David Goffin got to work shaking off his recent reputation as a runner-up, with the fourth seed powering into the second round of the Rotterdam World Tennis 6-1, 6-3 over Nicolas Mahut yesterday.

After winning Asian titles in Shenzhen and Tokyo last autumn, the Belgian then played the final of the ATP year-end event in London in November, losing to Grigor Dimitrov, this week's second seed in Rotterdam behind Roger Federer.

In addition, Goffin finished runner-up at the 2017 Dutch tournament and played on the Belgian side, which lost the Davis Cup final to France.

Goffin beat the 101st-ranked Mahut for the fourth time in five meetings, with the pair last squaring off in 2016.

The fourth seed spent barely an hour in defeating the 35-year-old Mahut, firing seven aces and breaking four times.

Luxembourg's Gilles Muller, seeded ninth after the pre-event injury pullout of defending champion and eighth seed Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, lost to Russian qualifier Daniil Medvedev 6-4, 7-6 (9).

Muller had to fight as he saved 11 of 14 break points in defeat.

Serb Viktor Troicki beat German Jan-Lennard Struff 1-6, 7-6 (5), 6-2. Philipp Kohlschreiber earned a German win as he stopped Karol Khachanov of Russia 3-6, 7-6 (1), 7-6 (5).



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TWENTY20 TRI-SERIES

# Williamson fires Kiwis to victory over England

AFP  
Wellington

Captain Kane Williamson silenced his critics with a half century as New Zealand defeated England by 12 runs in the fourth match of the T20 tri-series in Wellington yesterday, severely denting the tourists' hopes of making the final.

Williamson top-scored with 72 from 46 balls and opener Martin Guptill contributed 65 as the Black Caps battled to a tight victory over England.

The hosts had set a target of 197, and restricted England to 184 for nine in reply.

The result leaves Jos Buttler's men without a win in the series after losses to Australia in their previous two matches.

Buttler put the hosts in after winning the toss, hoping a mottled-looking drop-in pitch with huge bald patches would prove unplayable. But the gamble backfired as the wicket held up and New Zealand's batsmen finally hit their stride

after three straight T20 losses.

"The wicket obviously played a lot better than everyone thought and produced a really good game," said Buttler, who was standing in as captain for the injured Eoin Morgan. Williamson said it was a crucial win for New Zealand, who can seal a spot in the final of the triangular series with a win over Australia on Friday in Auckland.

On a personal note, his captain's knock was also rewarding after he had come under fire for a recent lean spell in the shortest form of the game.

"There's been a number of occasions recently when I've wanted to contribute more, so it was nice to spend some time in the middle today," he said.

New Zealand's move to shore up the batting also paid off as former Hong Kong international Mark Chapman made a useful cameo of 20 off 13 on his New Zealand debut. But the target was still achievable given Westpac Stadium's small boundaries, and England shrugged off the early loss of Jason Roy as fellow opener Alex Hales took up the cudgels.

Hales blasted three sixes and six fours in 24 balls to depart on 47, and England looked comfortable as they reached 95 for two. However when a dawdling James Vince was run out by Williamson, it started a steady stream of wickets that stole England's momentum.

Dawid Malan valiantly tried to revive the innings with 59 off 40 balls, but the only other batsman to offer any resistance was David Willey, whose departure on 21 spelled the end of England's chances.

**SCOREBOARD**

**New Zealand**  
M. Guptill c Plunkett b Rashid .....65  
C. Munro c Billings b Wood .....11  
K. Williamson b Jordan .....72  
C. de Grandhomme c Jordan b Rashid .0  
M. Chapman c Billings b Wood .....20  
R. Taylor not out .....1  
T. Seifert not out .....14  
**Extras (b1, lb5, w7) .....13**  
**Total (5 wickets; 20 overs) .....196**  
**Fall of wickets:** 1-39 (Munro), 2-121 (Guptill), 3-121 (de Grandhomme), 4-169

(Williamson), 5-181 (Chapman)  
**Bowling:** Willey 4-0-36-0, Wood 4-0-51-2 (3w), Jordan 4-0-34-1 (2w), Plunkett 4-0-33-0 (2w), Rashid 4-0-36-2

**England**  
J. Roy c Boulton b Southee .....8  
A. Hales c de Grandhomme b Sodhi .....47  
D. Malan c Boulton b Santner .....59  
J. Vince run out (Williamson) .....10  
J. Buttler c Southee b Sodhi .....2  
S. Billings c Sodhi b Santner .....12  
D. Willey run out (Seifert) .....21  
C. Jordan b Boulton .....6  
L. Plunkett b Boulton .....0  
A. Rashid not out .....8  
M. Wood not out .....5  
**Extras (b2, w2, lb2) .....6**  
**Total (9 wickets; 20 overs) .....184**  
**Fall of wickets:** 1-14 (Roy), 2-79 (Hales), 3-95 (Vince), 4-109 (Buttler), 5-129 (Billings), 6-158 (Malan), 7-168 (Jordan), 8-168 (Plunkett), 9-172 (Willey)  
**Bowling:** Boulton 4-0-46-2, Santner 4-0-29-2 (w1), Southee 4-0-30-1 (w1), Sodhi 4-0-49-2, Munro 2-0-11-0, de Grandhomme 2-0-15-0.



New Zealand's Kane Williamson bats during the first Twenty20 match against England at Westpac Stadium in Wellington yesterday. (AFP)

ONE DAY INTERNATIONAL

# Rohit century helps India secure series

'It was a long time coming. I just had to keep myself in a good frame of mind. I didn't feel I had to change a lot and I knew that the runs would come'

AFP  
Port Elizabeth

Rohit Sharma's century helped India wrap up the One Day International series against hosts South Africa with a 73-run victory at St George's Park yesterday.

India took an unassailable 4-1 lead in the six-match series as Sharma finally came good with the bat, scoring 115 after India were asked to bat first and amassed 274 for seven wickets in their 50 overs.

South Africa, who needed victory to keep alive their hopes of levelling the series, were all out for 201 in response.

India replace South Africa at the top of the International Cricket Council's ODI rankings. India's ODI series victory came after they lost 2-1 in the three tests played between the two countries last month.

Sharma had struggled with his batting on tour but got India off to a storming start as he finally found form. He was dropped on 96 by Tabraiz Shamsi before going onto make his 17th ODI century, reached off just 107 balls.

"It was a long time coming. I just had to keep myself in a good frame of mind. I didn't feel I had to change a lot and I knew that the runs would come," he said after being named man of the match.

But his dismissal, for India's fourth wicket, precipitated a mini collapse as 21-year-old fast bowler Lungisani Ngidi took four wickets in quick succession to finish with figures of 4-51.

India's last 10 overs produced only 55 runs and handed South Africa a gettable target at a run rate of 5.50.

But the hosts were 65-3 when AB de Villiers went cheaply after a rash shot in the 13th over and once Hashim Amla departed for 71 after a needless run out, home hopes were dashed.

A cameo 39 from wicket-keeper Heinrich Klaasen, who had been the hero of South Africa's victory in the last match,



India batsman Rohit Sharma in action during the fifth One Day International match against South Africa at St. George Park in Port Elizabeth yesterday. (AFP)

could not stem the inevitable. Kuldeep Yadav cleaned up the tail to finish with 4-57 in his 10 overs.

"We lost wickets in clumps and never got any momentum although it was a decent tally to chase," South Africa's stand-in captain Aiden Markram said.

The last match of the series is at Centurion in Pretoria on Friday and will be followed by three Twenty20 clashes.

Most of South Africa's Test players will sit out a three-match Twenty20 series against India, starting at the Wanderers Stadium on Sunday. JP Duminy, who has retired from Test cricket, will captain a squad which includes only batsman AB de Villiers of the country's likely first-choice Test players.

**SCOREBOARD**

**India**  
S. Dhawan c Phehlukwayo b Rabada .....34  
R. Sharma c Klaasen b Ngidi .....115  
V. Kohli run out (Duminy) .....36  
A. Rahane run out (Morkel) .....8  
S. Iyer c Klaasen b Ngidi .....30  
H. Pandya c Klaasen b Ngidi .....0  
M. Dhoni c Markram b Ngidi .....13  
B. Kumar not out .....19  
K Yadav not out .....2  
**Extras (b1, lb9, w7) .....17**  
**Total (7 wks, 50 overs) .....274**  
**Fall of wickets:** 1-48 (Dhawan), 2-153 (Kohli), 3-176 (Rahane), 4-236 (Sharma), 5-236 (Pandya), 7-265 (Dhoni)  
**Bowling:** Morkel 10-2-44-0 (1w), Rabada 9-0-58-1 (1w), Ngidi 9-1-51-4 (2w), Phehlukwayo 8-0-34-0 (1w), Duminy 4-0-29-0 (2w), Shamsi 10-0-48-0

**South Africa**  
H. Amla run out (Pandya) .....71  
A. Markram c Kohli b Bumrah .....32  
J. Duminy c Sharma b Pandya .....1  
A. de Villiers c Dhoni b Pandya .....6  
D. Miller b Chahal .....36  
H. Klaasen st Dhoni b Kuldeep Yadav .....39  
A. Phehlukwayo b Kuldeep Yadav .....0  
K. Rabada c Chahal b Kuldeep Yadav .....3  
M. Morkel lbw b Chahal .....1  
T. Shamsi c Pandya b Kuldeep Yadav .....0  
L. Ngidi not out .....4  
**Extras (lb6, w2) .....8**  
**Total (42.2 overs) .....201**  
**Fall of wickets:** 1-52 (Markram), 2-55 (Duminy), 3-65 (De Villiers), 4-127 (Miller), 5-166 (Amla), 6-168 (Phehlukwayo), 7-196 (Rabada), 8-197 (Klaasen), 9-197 (Shamsi)  
**Bowling:** Kumar 7-0-43-0, Bumrah 7-0-22-1, Pandya 9-0-30-2 (1w), Kuldeep Yadav 10-0-57-4, Chahal 9.2-0-43-2 (1w)  
**Result: India won by 73 runs**

SPOTLIGHT

## Qatar beat Uganda in Twenty20 match

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Qatar registered a superb 14-run victory over visiting Uganda in National Sport Day Twenty20 match at the Asian Town Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Batting first, Qatar lost six wickets for just 49 runs in 10 overs against the fine spells of Deusdedit Muhumuza and Charles Waiswa.

Qatar bounced back through an unbeaten 72-run seventh-wicket stand between Noman Sarvar and Mohamed Rizlan. Sarvar had a boundary in 32-ball 35 not out, while Rizlan smashed two sixes and a four during his knock of 35 not out. Uganda's Deusdedit Muhumuza claimed three for 10, while Charles Waiswa clinched two for 19.

Uganda, who had beaten Qatar in previous two matches – one T20 game and other 50-over-a-side game, appeared to be cantering towards the victory with Riazat Ali Shah and Irfan Sahibzada getting the runs with ease. But, Mohamed Nadeem triggered a collapse as his three for 12 lifted the hosts to a superb 14-run victory.

Nadeem in his fourth and final over removed Riazat (23 in 26 balls) and Frank Nsubuga (0). And in between, Brian Msaba (0) was run out brilliantly. From a healthy-looking score,



Qatar's Noman Sarvar

Uganda slumped to 97 for seven. In the next over, Chaudhry sent back Muhumuza to make it 98 for eight. In the remaining two overs, Qatar looked better off as they needed two wickets and Uganda required 23 runs.

The hosts picked another wicket through Mohamed Awaiz and the tourists ended with 107 for nine, falling short of the target by 14 runs.

Qatar's Sarvar was declared the Man of the Match for his all-round contribution (35 not out and one wicket).

**BRIEF SCORES**

Qatar beat Uganda by 14 runs  
Qatar 121 for six in 20 overs (Noman Sarvar 35 not out in 32 balls, Mohamed Rizlan 35 runs in 35 balls, Mohamed Tanveer 22 in 16 balls, Charles Waiswa 2/19, Deusdedit Muhumuza 3/10)  
Uganda 107 for nine in 20 overs (Riazat Ali Shah 23 runs in 26 balls, Irfan Sahibzada 22 off 15 balls, Iqbal Hussain Chaudhry 2/17, Mohamed Nadeem 3/12)  
**Man of the Match:** Noman Sarvar (Qatar).

**Aussie paceman Bird out of South Africa tour**

Paceman Jackson Bird was ruled out of Australia's Test squad for South Africa with a hamstring injury and replaced by fellow speedster Chadd Sayers. Bird pulled his hamstring while bowling in a domestic match in Brisbane last weekend and is expected to be sidelined for up to three weeks, opening the door for the uncapped Sayers. "It's disappointing for Jackson, but it is exciting for Chadd at the same time," Australian captain Steve Smith said. "It's kind of a like for like sort of bowler, they're pretty similar. They both stand the seam up nicely and Chadd's been rewarded for what he has done in Shield cricket over the last couple of years, which is great." Sayers was the leading wicket-taker in the Sheffield Shield last season with 62 victims.

DEVELOPMENT

## Stokes to join England in New Zealand

AFP  
Bristol, United Kingdom

Ben Stokes will join the England squad in New Zealand after the star all-rounder pleaded not guilty yesterday to a charge of affray over a nightclub incident that forced him out of the Ashes tour.

The 26-year-old all-rounder appeared at Bristol Magistrates' Court in the southwest of England along with two other men and will next appear at Bristol Crown Court on March 12.

The England and Wales Cricket Board issued a statement shortly after Stokes's first court appearance confirming his travel plans but he is not expected to make an immediate return after nearly five months out of the side.

"Having entered his plea at Bristol Magistrates' Court today, Ben Stokes will now travel to New Zealand to join the England squad," said an ECB spokesman. "He departs tomorrow,

Wednesday 14 February, and will arrive on Friday 16 February, ready to train with England teammates in Hamilton."

The statement said any decision to include him in upcoming matches would be made by the England management team.

He is not currently being considered for the ongoing International Twenty20 tri-series against New Zealand and Australia.

England start a five-match one-day international series against New Zealand on February 25, followed by two Tests.

"(The) ECB fully respects his right to defend himself in court and any obligations he has within the legal process will always take precedence over England commitments," added the statement.

Stokes, who missed England's 4-0 Ashes drubbing after being suspended from playing for England, appeared at the court in Bristol along with Ryan Ali and Ryan Hale.

FOCUS

## Khan skittles Zimbabwe to give Afghanistan victory

AFP  
Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Leg-spin sensation Rashid Khan took five wickets as Afghanistan cruised to a six-wicket win over Zimbabwe in the third one-day international at Sharjah yesterday.

The Afghans now lead the series 2-1 with two matches remaining, as the teams warm up for the 2019 World Cup qualifiers in Zimbabwe next month.

Zimbabwe won the toss and batted

first, but collapsed from 117-3 to 154 all out as 19-year-old Khan finished with figures of 5-24. Rahmat Shah and Nasir Jamal both struck half-centuries in Afghanistan's reply as they wrapped up victory with 22.3 overs remaining.

Zimbabwe recovered from 44-3 with Sikandar Raza hitting 38 and Craig Ervine 39, but both fell LBW to Khan as the teenager, who was bought by Sunrisers Hyderabad for \$1.41 million in last month's IPL auction, ran through the middle order.

Mujeeb Ur Rahman, 16, again im-

pressed opening the bowling with his leg-breaks and claimed the key wicket of second-match centurion Brendan Taylor on his way to 3-45.

Big-hitting Afghanistan wicketkeeper Mohamed Shahzad – continuing his return from a drugs ban – fell early, but Shah and Jamal combined to put on 69, before Mohammad Nabi and Najibullah Zadran finished the job with some lusty blows.

Afghanistan will look to win the series in the fourth ODI at Sharjah on Friday, with the sides set to meet again in Group

B of World Cup qualifying on March 6.

Qualification for the 10-team World Cup in England and Wales next year would continue Afghanistan's remarkable rise, with the war-torn nation to play their maiden Test match against India at Bangalore in June.

**BRIEF SCORES**

Zimbabwe 154 all out in 34.3 overs (Rashid Khan 5-24, Mujeeb Ur Rahman 3-45) v Afghanistan 158-4 in 27.3 overs (Rahmat Shah 56, Nasir Jamal 51)  
Afghanistan won by six wickets



# WINTER OLYMPICS

## ALPINE SKIING

# Hirscher dominates tough course for first gold medal

'I was in the top 30 which shows we made the right decision... because if you're in the top 30 you have a real chance for a medal'

AFP  
Pyeongchang

Austrian ace Marcel Hirscher's long wait for Olympic gold ended yesterday when he produced a brilliant slalom run to storm to a dominant victory in the men's alpine combined.

Alexis Pinturault claimed silver for France with his teammate Victor Muffat-Jeandet taking an astonishing bronze after finishing 29th fastest in the opening downhill.

Hirscher, 28, has been the outstanding skier in the World Cup in recent years, his 55 career wins the bedrock of a startling six consecutive overall crystal globes.

Already guaranteed to go down in alpine history as one of the best skiers of all time, Hirscher had said he was after an "amazing" Olympic gold to cap his career, his previous best a slalom silver from Sochi four years ago.

Hirscher admitted he had thought of Olympic glory "every day".

"Now it is over and this is a positive thing!" he said.

The racer had played down his medal hopes in the combined following a couple of mediocre downhill training runs.

"We had no expectations for this combined," he said.

"We made a decision to start here, which was a high risk decision because (Norwegian slalom rival) Henrik Kristoffersen has already had five days' training slalom. What if I'd finished 20th, people would be asking whether that was the right decision or not."

There was to be no messing on a downhill course shortened because of blustery winds, however, and the canny Austrian took full advantage of the abbreviated run to finish an impressive 12th fastest, 1.32sec off German Thomas Dressen's lead time.

"I was in the top 30 which shows we made the right decision... because if you're in the top 30 you have a real chance for a medal," Hirscher said.

Come the slalom, a discipline in which he has won six times



Gold medalist Marcel Hirscher (centre) of Austria, silver medalist Alexis Pinturault (left) of France and bronze medalist Victor Muffat-Jeandet of France on the podium of Alpine combined at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics yesterday. (Reuters)

this season on the World Cup circuit, Austria's favourite sporting son stepped up to the gate and promptly delivered the fastest time of 45.96sec.

It was an aggressive yet measured piece of skiing that gave him a combined time of 2min 06.52sec, 0.23sec ahead of Pinturault, with Muffat-Jeandet at 1.02sec.

"I was the favourite after the downhill," said Pinturault, who was 10th fastest in the speed event and started his slalom with a 0.28sec lead over Hirscher.

"But after what Marcel has shown since the start of the season, especially in slalom, it was very tough for me to be able to come close.

"I'm just very happy," said

Pinturault, winner of Bormio's World Cup combined in December. "He was just stronger than me today."

Muffat-Jeandet laid down a slalom run just one-hundredth of a second slower than Hirscher, paying the price for a big mistake on the top third of the downhill. "I was so annoyed by the downhill," he said.

"But at the end of the day I stayed very focused. I always believed in it."

It was France's first podium showing in the combined since Henri Oreiller (gold) and James Couttet (bronze) in 1948.

Austrian slalom specialist Marco Schwarz was fourth, one place ahead of American Ted Ligety, who was seeking a third Olympic gold medal having won

the combined back in Torino in 2006.

The Norwegian threat petered out disappointingly despite two-time former world combined champion Aksel Lund Svindal finishing second fastest in the downhill.

Svindal, 35, was a non-starter in the slalom, while team-mate Kjetil Jansrud, fourth fastest in the downhill, eventually came in seventh, 2.15sec off the pace and one place behind a third Frenchman, Thomas Mermillod Blondin.

Among the top eight, Austrian pair Vincent Kriechmayr and reigning Olympic downhill champion Matthias Mayer, along with Italian duo Dominik Paris and Peter Fill, all failed to finish the slalom course.

### MEDALS TABLE

Country	G	S	B	T
Germany	5	2	2	9
Netherlands	4	4	2	10
Norway	3	5	3	11
Canada	3	4	3	10
US	3	1	2	6
France	2	1	2	5
Sweden	2	1	0	3
Austria	2	0	0	2
Italy	1	1	1	3
South Korea	1	0	1	2
OAR	0	1	4	5
Japan	0	1	2	3
Czech Republic	0	1	1	2
Australia	0	1	0	1
China	0	1	0	1
Switzerland	0	1	0	1
Slovakia	0	1	0	1
Finland	0	0	2	2
Kazakhstan	0	0	1	1

## FOCUS

# Japanese vows to clear name in first Olympics drug case

AFP  
Pyeongchang

Japanese short-track speed skater Kei Saito vowed to clear his name yesterday after testing positive for a banned substance in the first doping case to hit the Pyeongchang Olympics.

The 21-year-old is the first Japanese to test positive at a Winter Olympics and he was immediately thrown out of the Games on Monday.

The case will no doubt embarrass Japan, organisers of the Summer Games in 2020, and again forces the drug issue to the fore after Russia were formally banned for state-sponsored doping.

Saito returned positive tests for acetazolamide, an unauthorised diuretic which can be used to mask powerful performance-enhancing drugs.

"I want to fight to prove my innocence because I don't remember (taking the drug) and it's incomprehensible," Saito said in a statement.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), which handles doping cases during the Games, said Saito had left the athletes' Olympic Village voluntarily and would be provisionally suspended from all competition pending a full investigation.

The head of the Japanese Olympic delegation in Pyeongchang, Yasuo Saito, said the skater was the first Japanese athlete to test positive for doping at a Winter Olympic Games.

The athlete was "surprised and dismayed" by the outcome of the drugs test, he said.

Saito, a human biology student whose sister Hitomi is also competing in Pyeongchang, arrived at the Athletes Village on February 4.

He was woken up at 2:00am the following morning by doping

testers who took two samples.

"Both samples tested positive," said the head of the delegation, who is also the vice-president of the Japan Olympic Committee.

Short-track speed skater Saito was a member of Japan's 3,000m relay team that finished third at the 2013 and 2014 world junior championships.

He was pencilled in as a substitute for the 5,000m yesterday and could have raced in other events in Pyeongchang.

Saito was summoned before a CAS tribunal on Monday following the positive tests for acetazolamide, a medication used to treat complaints ranging from epilepsy to heart failure.

However, it works also as a masking agent that can hide or make it harder for testers to detect the presence of doping products.

Saito said he was innocent of any wrongdoing and had been tested prior to the Games, on January 29, and been found to be drug-free.

"As for the test results this time, the only possibility I can think of is that I accidentally and unconsciously put a banned substance in my mouth," he added.

He had no need to ingest masking agents, he said.

"I've never used body-enhancing drugs so I don't think about hiding it," he said. "There's no merit or motive for me in using this medicine."

The IOC and anti-doping authorities have stepped up testing for the Pyeongchang Games following revelations of a state-sponsored doping scheme at the last Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia in 2014.

The entire Russian team was banned from Pyeongchang but a loophole allowed 168 "clean" athletes to compete as independent athletes under a neutral flag.



Japan's Kei Saito skates ahead of South Korea's Lim Hyo-Jun during the men's 500m short track semi-finals at the first winter Youth Olympic Games in Innsbruck. (Reuters)

## SPOTLIGHT

# Kim melts hearts with tearful snowboarding gold

AFP  
Pyeongchang

American teenage sensation Chloe Kim romped to Olympic snowboarding gold in the women's halfpipe yesterday before bursting into tears as the enormity of her achievement sunk in.

The 17-year-old, who has melted the hearts of home fans in Pyeongchang thanks to her ever-ready smile and Korean heritage, justified her status as the hot favourite with an eye-popping top score of 98.25.

Kim had been assured of gold before her pulsating final run after China's Liu Jiayu crashed on her last descent.

Pumping her fists after finishing with back-to-back 1080 spins, Kim was serenaded by a pumped-up crowd chanting: "Chloe Kim, Chloe Kim!"

But after wrapping herself in the American flag, Kim was suddenly overcome with emotion and the tears flowed as she celebrated with her Korean parents.

"I'm a little overwhelmed," she said after composing herself. "I don't really know what's happening and I'm actually feeling a little anxious right now."

"There was a lot of pressure," added Kim, who was so good at 13 she might have won gold in Sochi - but she was too young to compete.

"You wait for four years and it's pretty nerve-wracking. There definitely was a lot of hype but I'm proud of how I was able to handle the pressure today."

Liu claimed silver with a score of 89.75 points and American Arielle Gold the bronze four points further back.

But neither looked like threatening Kim,

who found time to take to Twitter between runs to complain she was having trouble keeping down her breakfast.

"I wanted to go bigger and better on that third run," said the four-time X Games champion. "I messed up on my second run so I'm kind of annoyed but I got redemption on my third."

"Those were obviously tears of joy," Kim joked after the medallists were presented with cuddly toys.

"The mascots are cute but standing on top of that podium was an insane feeling."

Kim also revealed that her number one fan - her Seoul-based grandmother - had been in the crowd cheering her on.

"I actually only found out my grandma was at the bottom before my second run," she said.

"So I thought 'this one's for grams!' I can't wait to go shopping with her."

While his daughter was bewitching the local fans, Kim's father, Jong Jin, was spotted waving a hand-made sign which read: "Go, Chloe!"

Afterwards, the proud father admitted to feeling the pressure of his daughter's quest for Olympic gold.

"It was very stressful because the media kept saying Chloe was going to win," he told AFP.

"But nobody knows. We can control the process but we can't control the result. I never thought about gold. All I ever think about is how dangerous snowboarding is and what if she falls," added the worried dad.

"But grandma of course was very happy. She's very sweet to Chloe and when she goes to church next I'm sure she's going to tell all her friends about Chloe's gold medal."



Chloe Kim of the US celebrates her snowboarding victory in the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics yesterday. (Reuters)

### Bach for Nobel peace prize? No 'formal discussion', says IOC

Olympic officials played down a suggestion that the unified Korean ice hockey team could be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and said there had been "no formal discussion" about proposing IOC chief Thomas Bach for the honour. Mark Adams, spokesman for the International Olympic Committee, said there had been "no consideration whatsoever" within the body of nominating the joint Korean team, following a suggestion by American IOC member Angela Ruggiero. "From an IOC administrative level there's been no consideration whatsoever of this. Obviously members are able to have their own personal views... but there's been no discussion," he said.

When asked if Bach should be proposed for the prize, after helping broker North Korea's attendance, Adams said: "There's no formal discussion yet at all."

Bach is scheduled to visit North Korea after the Games, where their athletes marched together with South Korea at the opening ceremony. The two Koreas also formed their first unified Olympic team in the women's ice hockey.

North Korea's participation has triggered a burst of reconciliation with South Korea, including a visit by Kim Jong-un's sister Kim Yo-jong and an invitation to Pyongyang for South Korean leader Moon Jae-in.

### Canada sweep past Swiss for first mixed doubles gold

Canada were crowned the first Olympics mixed doubles curling champions yesterday, claiming gold with a 10-3 blowout win over world champions Switzerland. The victory placed John Morris and Kaitlyn Lawes in elite company, the Canadians adding their names to a short list of four curlers who have won two Olympic gold medals. Lawes, a member of Canada's gold medal women's team in Sochi, and Morris, part of the men's gold medal foursome at the 2010 Vancouver Games, got the Pyeongchang Games off to a rocky start by dropping their opener but that would be their only blemish on an otherwise flawless run to the gold medal.

Swiss pair Jenny Perret and Martin Rios added an Olympic silver to their world championship title. "You never know how many times you are going to get to an Olympics, it's such a privilege if you can get to one," Morris told reporters.

"The pressure is always on whether you are a hockey player or a hockey fan everyone wants you to bring home the gold and it just feels so great that we were able to do that."

The final was at first a strategic tug-of-war between Olympic and world champions with Canada scoring two in the opening end and the Swiss answering with a pair in the second. But the turning-point came early in the third end when Rios missed a takeout and Lawes with her final stone made a superb raise tap to give Canada a four and a commanding 6-2 lead the Swiss could never overcome.

After Canada scored a pair in the fifth end and stole a pair in the sixth the Swiss waved the white flag, conceding the gold to Lawes and Morris with two ends still to play. "The game of mixed doubles the strategy is offence," said Morris. "That's why I think it is such a great sport because when you get up a few points unlike team curling where you can coast and play defensive, the best defence in mixed-doubles is a good offence you have to keep the pressure on. "As a result you are either going to get games that are 12-11 or games that are lopsided."

NHL

# Coyotes send Blackhawks to sixth loss in row

Reuters  
Chicago

The Chicago Blackhawks' longest losing streak in six years continued Monday night, this time for the benefit of the NHL's worst team.

Max Domi, Clayton Keller, Alex Goligoski and Tobias Rieder each notched a goal and an assist while Antti Raanta made 37 saves as the Arizona Coyotes cruised to a 6-1 win at Gila River Arena in Glendale, Ariz.

It was just the 14th victory in 56 games for Arizona, which has a league-low 38 points. However, the Coyotes led 2-0 before the first period was half-over and answered Chicago's only goal with four unanswered markers to enjoy a rare two-point evening.

The Blackhawks fell to 0-5-1 in a six-game losing streak.

Domi got the scoring started 92 seconds into the game with his fourth goal. Jakob Chychrun

ripped a shot from the left point, and Domi deflected it in the slot. The puck eluded Anton Forsberg, the start of a forgettable night for the Blackhawks goalie.

Keller made it 2-0 at 9:22, rapping in the rebound of a Derek Stepan shot for his 16th marker of the season. Keller took advantage of a giveaway behind the Chicago net and fed Stepan, then backhanded the puck past Forsberg. Alex DeBrincat drew the Blackhawks within 2-1 on a power-play tally at 4:33 of the second period, taking advantage of a Lance Bouma screen to wire a slapper past Raanta from atop the left circle. The goal was DeBrincat's 20th, making him the second rookie this season to reach 20.

Chicago's momentum lasted only 2:33. With Arizona short-handed, Goligoski took a wrist shot at a bad angle along the left boards that squirted through Forsberg's pads for his seventh goal. It was the end of Forsberg's night, as he allowed three goals on only 13 shots.



Arizona Coyotes goalie Antti Raanta (left) and defenseman Alex Goligoski celebrate after defeating the Chicago Blackhawks 6-1 in their NHL game at Gila River Arena. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

Jeff Glass came into the game, but was beaten by Rieder on a rebound at 9:33 of the second period. Glass made the initial save on Christian Fischer's shot, but Rieder pounced on the puck and swatted a backhander into the net for a power-play goal, his

seventh tally of the season. Nick Cousins added his 10th goal on a deflection of Goligoski's shot at 7:11 of the third period. Christian Dvorak finished the scoring with his ninth goal on a wrist at 15:38. Meanwhile, Vincent Trocheck

scored two power-play goals in the third period, then completed the hat trick with an empty-netter as the visiting Florida Panthers beat the Edmonton Oilers 7-5 on Monday night at Rogers Place.

Florida goalie James Reimer buoyed his team's shaky playoff

hopes by making 27 saves in his return to action after missing six games due to a groin injury.

The Oilers, on a night when they honoured the 1984-85 team that was voted the greatest in league history on the NHL's website, received a major blow to their playoff chances. What started out a sleepy Monday affair between two non-conference clubs became a wild and crazy clash because the defensive play and goaltending provided memories of mid-1980s hockey.

For the Panthers, Evgenii Dadonov scored twice, his second on a third-period penalty shot that ended up being the game-winner, while Aaron Ekblad and Denis Malgin added singles. Ekblad, Malgin, Jonathan Huberdeau, Michael Matheson and Keith Yandle also had two-point nights for the visitors.

For the Oilers, Patrick Maroon and Connor McDavid collected one goal and one assist apiece, while Leon Draisaitl, also on a penalty shot, Anton Slepyshev

and Drake Caggiula scored.

Not only did the Oilers surrender the first goal in a game for the 33rd time in 55 outings but they were torched for three more power-play goals against. Edmonton has allowed 38 man-advantage markers in its 28 home games. Goalie Cam Talbot stopped 33 shots for the Oilers, who are now on a four-game losing skid. The score was 3-3 before Trocheck put the visitors on top 18 seconds into the third period. His second power-play goal of the night, at 6:05 of the third, doubled the lead, but Slepyshev replied for Edmonton 48 seconds later. Dadonov's penalty shot put Florida up 6-4 at 10:46, but McDavid's goal at 14:58 kept the Oilers close. Trocheck's empty-netter with exactly a minute left sealed the Panthers' victory.

RESULTS

Toronto	4	Tampa Bay	3
Florida	7	Edmonton	5
Arizona	6	Chicago	1

NBA

# LaVine lifts Bulls past Magic, Jazz

## on a roll

Everybody wants to have the ball in their hands at the end of games. But you have to have the confidence and the ability to do it

AFP  
Los Angeles

Zach LaVine's scored 18 points but his biggest contributions came late in the game as the Chicago Bulls eased past the Orlando Magic 105-101 on Monday.

LaVine busted loose for a thunderous go-ahead dunk to break a 101-101 tie then iced the win with two free throws for the Bulls, who won despite blowing an 18-point lead in the fourth quarter. Lauri Markkanen delivered 21 points as Chicago won their second straight after losing seven in a row.

LaVine stole Jonathon Simmons' inbounds pass with 15 seconds left and finished with a slam. He added the free throws after Mario Hezonja missed a three-pointer.

"I was trying to be aggressive on the inbounds," LaVine said. "I wasn't trying to obviously go for a steal and be able to get out of position, but it opened up like it did."

"I embrace it. You have to get it done. Everybody wants to have the ball in their hands at the end of games. But you have to have the confidence and the ability to do it. And I think I do."

Bobby Portis added 19 points and seven rebounds, and Jerian Grant had 14 points and seven assists in the win. Hezonja led Orlando with 24 points, and Evan Fournier scored 22.

The Bulls appeared to be headed to victory after going on an 11-0 run that gave them a 93-75 lead with eight minutes remaining.

But the Magic didn't give up as Hezonja nailed a three-pointer with just over three minutes left in regulation to give them a two point, 98-96, lead. Portis later tied it 101-101 by hitting a shot from beyond the arc with 2:29 left, setting the stage for LaVine's final minute heroics.

In Salt Lake City, Donovan Mitchell hit the go-ahead pull-up jumper with 39 seconds left as the Utah Jazz stretched their league-best winning streak to 10 games with a 101-99 win over the San Antonio Spurs.

Mitchell, who finished with 25 points, hit a pair of go-ahead baskets and a free throw to give the Jazz the lead in the final minute. Joe Ingles finished with 20 points, seven rebounds and five assists for the Jazz who had to rally from a 13-point deficit in the fourth. Derrick Favors tallied 19 points and eight rebounds.

Pau Gasol scored 15 points and grabbed 15 rebounds and Kyle Anderson delivered 16



Zach LaVine (left) of the Chicago Bulls is pressured by Evan Fournier of the Orlando Magic during their NBA game at the United Centre in Chicago, Illinois. (AFP)

points and for the Spurs, who lost to Utah for the third time this season.

Meanwhile, Stephen Curry scored 10 of his team-high 22 points in the second quarter Monday night, helping the Golden State Warriors overcome an early deficit en route to a 129-83 blowout of the Phoenix Suns in Oakland, Calif.

The Warriors' third consecutive win to close a four-game homestand came despite a second straight impressive performance by the Suns' Elfrid Payton, who led all scorers with 29 points.

Payton, acquired from the Orlando Magic for just a second-round pick last week, hit 11 of his 18 shots and also had eight rebounds and a team-high five assists in 31 minutes. However,

the Suns lost for the sixth consecutive time on a night when they were formally eliminated from the Pacific Division title race.

Kevin Durant had 17 points and Klay Thompson 16 for the Warriors, who beat Phoenix for the 12th straight time, their longest active streak against any opponent. It was the clubs' first meeting this season.

With Payton hitting his first seven shots and scoring 16 early points, the Suns led 26-25 in the first minute of the second quarter before the Warriors took control. Nick Young, Patrick McCaw, Thompson and Curry all sank 3-pointers in a 37-point Warriors explosion in the second quarter that opened as much as a 17-point lead. Curry's 22 points vaulted him

and his dad, Dell, into a tie with Rick and Brent Barry for third place in career scoring among NBA father/son combinations. Both duos have 26,883 points.

Curry also had nine rebounds and a game-high seven assists in 30 minutes.

The Warriors played without Draymond Green, out due to a sprained left index finger. His replacement, Omri Casspi, recorded a 19-point, game-high 10-rebound double-double, and Young added 16 points.

Golden State shot 58.4% from the field in a matchup of the league's highest-scoring team and the most porous defensive squad.

The Warriors won for the 25th consecutive time this season when scoring 120 or more points.

TJ Warren had 14 points for the Suns, who played for the fourth straight time without leading scorer Devin Booker, sidelined due to a hip pointer.

Payton had 19 points, six rebounds and nine assists in his Suns debut Saturday against the Denver Nuggets.

Elsewhere, Anthony Davis finished with 38 points and 10 rebounds, Jrue Holiday and Nikola Mirotic each scored 21, and the New Orleans Pelicans stopped the Detroit Pistons 118-103.

RESULTS

Golden State	129	Phoenix	83
Brooklyn	101	LA Clippers	114
Utah	101	San Antonio	99
Chicago	105	Orlando	101
Detroit	103	New Orleans	118
Philadelphia	108	New York	92

SPOTLIGHT

## Bjorn, Johnston to lead strong field in Indian Open golf

AFP  
New Delhi

Ryder Cup captain Thomas Bjorn and popular England golfer Andrew Johnston will head a strong field at the 54th Hero Indian Open in March.

They will join top Indian players including rising star Shubhankar Sharma and defending champ SSP Chawrasia in the event which offers \$1.75mn in prize money.

The Asian Tour tournament is co-sanctioned by the European Tour.

"The Indian Open has become a key date on the Asian Tour schedule over the years and a welcome addition to the European Tour's international roster of tournaments since 2015," said Charlie Tingey, EurAsia golf senior director, in New Delhi yesterday.

Denmark's Bjorn - who will become the first Scandinavian to

lead Europe in this year's Ryder Cup at Le Golf National in Paris - has claimed 15 European tour titles.

Johnston will bolster the list of marquee players, which will include Argentina's Emiliano Grillo - a PGA Tour winner and member of the 2017 Presidents Cup team. Sharma, 21, will be the local favourite, having won two European Tour events including the \$3mn Maybank Championship in Malaysia in under two months.

Sharma - ranked 71st in the world - will be joined by Indian stars Shiv Kapur, Team Asia captain Arjun Atwal and past tournament winner Anirban Lahiri at the DLF Golf and Country Club in Gurgaon for the event starting March 8.

"There is lot of healthy competition from the younger guys and the older ones are still knocking on the door... there is a golden generation of Indian golf that is pushing each other on," Kapur told reporters.

CRICKET

## ACC retain CDC First Division Trophy

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Asian Cricket Council (ACC) defeated Hanan XII by a two wickets in the CDC Cricket Tournament final to retain the first division trophy. Last year also ACC defeated Hanan XII in the final.

With the help of a fine half-century by Hamid (58runs), Hanan XII scored 192 in their 20 overs. Gyan and Said also contributed 18 and 14 runs, respectively.

For ACC, Sarfaraz took three wickets for 18 runs and Mannu claimed two wickets for 27 runs. Sameer and Bilal also claimed one wicket each.

ACC batsmen achieved the target in 19.5 overs after losing eight wickets. Adnan remained not out on 58 runs. He faced 27 balls and slammed six sixes and two fours. Bilal also scored 38 runs with the help of four sixes. Parvez and Gyan took two wickets each for Hanan.

Adnan was declared man-of-the-match, while best batsman trophy went to Farooq of CRCC Warriors. Mannu of ACC and Imran of Hanan were adjudged best bowler and best all-rounder of the tournament. Sammer of Hanan won the best wicket-keeper award.

Construction Development Company (CDC) Business Development Manager Sanjiv Jain gave away the prizes.



ACC players pose with the trophy after retaining the CDC first division title.



Hanan XII pose with their runners-up trophy.



## ARGENTINA WANT MESSI TO PLAY LESS FOR BARCA – PRESIDENT

Reuters  
Barcelona

Argentina's national football association (AFA) president Claudio Tapia has said he has spoken to captain Lionel Messi about playing fewer games for La Liga side Barcelona in order to stay fresh for his country ahead of the 2018 World Cup. Tapia's pleas have largely gone unheeded by Barca coach Ernesto Valverde, who has started Messi in 33 of the team's total



39 games this season, only leaving him out of the matchday squad in three King's Cup games.

The coach did leave Messi out of the starting line-up for the first time in the league against Espanyol on Feb. 4 but threw the Argentine on as a substitute to help salvage a 1-1 draw.

"I hope all the players arrive in the level they are at the moment. Sergio Aguero is playing outstanding right now and Lionel Messi is always at the top of his game," Tapia told Argentine network TYC Sports. "That's vital for the directors and the coaching staff. We have spoken to Messi about taking care of himself and about playing less for Barcelona."

Tapia also said Argentina are planning to play a friendly against Catalonia in June as part of their preparations for the World Cup in Russia, where they will hope to better their runners-up finish four years ago in Brazil.

A game against Catalonia could theoretically see Messi come up against Barca team mates Sergio Busquets, Sergi Roberto and Gerard Pique among others. However, such a fixture could prove controversial in Spain after increased tensions between the central government and the region over its independence drive.

## FOOTBALL

## Liverpool ready to unleash Salah and Firmino on Porto

While Egyptian Salah's goals have been a revelation since his move to the club last year, it has been the performances of Brazilian Firmino that have been just as important



Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah celebrates scoring their second goal during their English Premier League match against Southampton on Feb 11.

DPA  
London

Liverpool will unleash one of Europe's most prolific attacking partnerships on Porto when the two sides meet in the last 16 of the Champions League today.

Back in the competition for only the second time since 2009, Liverpool topped their qualification group and are third in the Premier League. Their style of high-press and pace in attack has yielded 61 goals in 27 league games, 34 of them on their travels.

In all competitions, Mohamed Salah, with 29, and Roberto Firmino, with 20, have ripped defences apart both at home and abroad. Their combined tally of 49 is second only to the 55 of Luis Suarez and

Daniel Sturridge in 2013/14 and with a third of the season to go, they look sure to set a new mark.

Though Philippe Coutinho has gone to Barcelona, with Senegal forward Sadio Mane also on board, Liverpool's front three is the envy of many teams. But it is the goalscoring efforts of Salah and Firmino in particular which has manager Jurgen Klopp purring as he ponders options for the trip to Portugal for the first leg.

"Both profit from our style of play that's for sure," Klopp said. "We have these three (including Mane) play in the areas where they like to have the ball, it's good. In this strong league, you cannot be third without fantastic players. They are two of them."

While Egyptian Salah's goals have been a revelation since his move to the club last year, it has been the performances of Bra-

zilian Firmino that have been just as important.

"Everybody knows Roberto is not as quick as Mo but in the right moment he is there because he wants to be there with each part of his body," Klopp said of his side's pressing, high up the pitch. "Then there's Mo and Sadio as well."

Having won the trophy five times, most recently in 2005, Liverpool have a pedigree in European competition that few clubs can rival. But their return to the competition after four years away is being celebrated on Merseyside, with local newspaper The Liverpool Echo heralding their return.

"For a club which has lifted the trophy on five occasions, a last 16 tie with Porto shouldn't be much to write home about," it said yesterday.

"However, there is no escaping the

significance of Liverpool's presence in the knockout stages of the Champions League. There's a buzz and rightly so."

Liverpool's defence has been the subject of much discussion over the past few seasons, an area twice champions Porto, who scored eight times from dead ball situations in the group stages, will look to exploit. But the addition of Dutch defender Virgil van Dijk in the January transfer window has added stability to their side.

As the Liverpool Echo said: "His leadership...and ability to keep his cool when the pressure is on is going to be key," it wrote. Klopp is already popular with Liverpool fans after rebuilding the side and playing such an attractive style of football. Reaching the final of the Europa League in 2016 gave them a taste. If Salah and Firmino perform, even Champions League glory may not be beyond them.

## BOXING

## Groves warns 'ignorant' Eubank Jnr ahead of fight



George Groves during his public work-out in Manchester yesterday.

AFP  
London

WBA super-middleweight champion George Groves has warned Chris Eubank Jnr that a lack of professionalism is setting him up for failure ahead of Saturday's title fight in Manchester.

Groves, 29, defends his title against fellow British fighter Eubank Jnr in their World Boxing Super Series semi-final at the Manchester Arena on Saturday – Groves's highest-profile bout since two defeats against Carl Froch in 2013 and 2014.

Eubank Jnr, the son of former middleweight and super-middleweight champion Chris Eubank, makes little secret of the fact he does not work with a traditional trainer or training set-up, and similarly to Groves before he fought Froch, has regularly promoted himself on social media.

Since this weekend's fight was confirmed the champion has maintained a significantly lower profile, and he said of Eubank Jnr: "He is that ignorant he thinks he can do it himself. 'The cornermen give me water: I do the rest, I train myself, I know what I'm doing!'"

"It doesn't work – the greatest fighters in the world have a great team or trainer around them just to nudge them in the right direction. The dad is supposed to be that, but it's the blind leading the blind. He doesn't know what he's doing, especially the dad. He's lost his grip on reality."

"I thought he might take him-

self off to Vegas and do a camp out there, work with some sort of decent trainer, you'd definitely be getting good sparring. But he hasn't – he's decided to come back home, train himself, spar anyone he can get hold of."

"He's got success through putting out videos, and attaching himself to big names and not having a real fight. The difference here is he's in a real fight!"

"I remember thinking Eubank Jnr's got the right ingredients," Groves added. "He's got the right attitude, he's tough – he'd get bashed up in sparring but be there again the next day ready – and ambitious."

"Now he's gone so far the other way, the bad habits are permanently ingrained in him from doing so much casual work from hitting bags and pads."

Almost four years have passed since Groves lost his rematch with Froch and suffered what he called the "fall from grace" from which he had to rebuild his reputation.

"Jnr might be looking beyond this fight, like I did," he said.

"I definitely looked beyond the Froch rematch – not because I thought it was a foregone conclusion, but I was supremely confident that I was going to do the job, I'd done a bit too much PR in the build-up, which was taxing, and come fight night I'd obviously got it wrong."

"It was a whirlwind. It was draining, it was taxing."

"He wants to do that, he is looking beyond this fight. It's who's better on the night, and have you prepared correctly? This is about who's better, and he's not."

## RUGBY

## France drop eight players

AFP  
Paris

Eight France players who went out in Edinburgh after the Six Nations loss to Scotland on Sunday were omitted from the squad announced yesterday for the next game, against Italy.

Those omitted from the 31-man squad for the match on February 23 in Marseille are Teddy Thomas, Louis Picamoles, Arthur Iturria, Anthony Belleau, Jonathan Danty, Sekou Macalou, Remi Lamerat and Felix Lambeay.

Of those eight, only winger Thomas, who scored two tries against Scotland and one against Ireland the previous week, at Murrayfield. Veteran No.8 Picamoles and fly-half Belleau came off the bench in

the second half.

"With their inappropriate behaviour they did not respect their status as international players and the responsibilities that brings," the French rugby federation said in a statement.

The night out became public when Scottish police delayed the departure of the French team's flight home on Monday morning. The police wanted to talk to six players because they were potential witnesses, rather than perpetrators, in a possible sexual assault but quickly concluded that no crime had been committed.

Of the six players interviewed by police only Ya-coubou Camara, who started at flanker against Scotland, has kept his place. Thomas, Iturria and Macalou were not among those taken off the plane but have also been punished by the French rugby federation for being in a bar late at night.

## Motorcycle Grands Prix shortened for TV

Paris: The distance of several Grands Prix on the motorcycle world circuit are to be shortened in a bid to standardise their durations and help television broadcasters, MotoGP said yesterday.

"This is to ensure that races have a similar duration at each venue on the World Championship calendar, enhancing event organisation and aiding television broadcasters to better structure race day programming," organisers said

in a statement. Seven courses at the elite MotoGP level will be reduced in distance for the 2018 season, while changes to races in the Moto2 and Moto3 classes will be implemented over the course of the next two seasons. In MotoGP, the Americas GP, French GP, Catalan GP, Czech GP and San Marino GP will all be shortened by a lap, with the Spanish GP to lose two laps and the Valencia GP to be trimmed by three laps.

## BOTTOMLINE

## Chinese authorities move to plug transfer loopholes

Reuters  
Hong Kong

Chinese football authorities have threatened to hand out suspensions and huge points deductions in a move to curb attempts to circumvent strict regulations on transfer spending in the Chinese Super League (CSL).

The move comes after several clubs have sought to find a way to avoid paying the 100% levy on transfers of foreign players over 45m yuan (\$7.10m) imposed on clubs last summer after

rampant spending in the country's top flight.

In a statement issued on Monday evening, the Chinese Football Association (CFA) said clubs, or third parties acting on their behalf, paying the buy-out clauses for overseas players would be deemed to have paid a transfer fee and will be subject to the tax should the amount exceed 45m yuan.

In addition, clubs who pay loan fees to sign players on a temporary basis will also be hit with the levy should the total sum paid exceed the threshold set last summer. The move covers the current transfer window, with the CFA reserving

the right to investigate transfers conducted last summer.

"Should the CFA be in any doubt regarding a player's eligibility, the registration of this player will be suspended," the statement said.

"Anyone can report any suspicious attempts to avoid the transfer adjustment fee. Once the CFA receives these reports and finds them to be true, clubs will be deducted 15 points in the 2018 season."

The statement could have a significant impact on big spending Tianjin Quanjian, who signed French striker Anthony Modeste from FC Koln in Germany on a two-year loan deal for almost

36m euro (\$44.43m). The structuring of the deal was seen as a way to avoid paying the levy.

Beijing Guoan have also been involved in a drawn out process over attempts to acquire former Villarreal striker Cedric Bakambu. The Congolese striker paid his 40m euro release clause to the Spanish club, who announced he was to join Beijing.

Bakambu has been photographed training with Beijing in Portugal but the club have yet to make an official announcement on the matter, despite reports in the Chinese media that he has signed a five-year contract.

SPOTLIGHT

# Conte relieved to have striker solutions in Giroud, Morata

AFP  
London

Antonio Conte is relieved to have options again up front in Olivier Giroud and fit-again Alvaro Morata ahead of what the Italian says is a "massive" few weeks for Chelsea.

Giroud's touch set up Eden Hazard for the opening goal as Chelsea rolled over rock-bottom West Bromwich Albion 3-0 on Monday. It moved them back into the Premier League top four and eased the mounting pressure on Conte following shock defeats to Bournemouth and Watford in their previous two outings.

Conte had been unable to name a recognised striker in either of those matches with Morata sidelined for nearly a month due to a back injury and Giroud

only having joined from Arsenal on January 31.

"We must be pleased for the Giroud performance," Conte said of the Frenchman, who was replaced by Morata on the hour after a battling display in which he had his head bandaged and took a blow to the ankle.

"(It) was the first time to play from the start with us. For sure he needs to improve to go into our way of football, but to have a point of reference like Olivier is very important. "We must be pleased because in the same night we found also Morata.

"I think he played very well in the last 30 minutes with great personality, with great spirit."

Conte confirmed Giroud will be fit for Hull City's visit to Stamford Bridge on Friday in the FA Cup fifth round before three blockbuster clashes that will go a long way to deciding the outcome of Chelsea's season.

The blues host Barcelona in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie on February 20 before back-to-back Premier League visits to Manchester United and runaway league leaders Manchester City.

"Today was very important to get three points because only after a win you can consider a game as easy," added Conte. "We want to go to the next round (against Hull) then to prepare the game against Barcelona and then United and City. Three massive games for us."

Chelsea's recent slump and Conte's outspoken comments over his lack of input to the club's recruitment strategy had seen the odds slashed on him becoming the latest coach to be fired by Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich.

But the Chelsea fans showed they were still fully behind Conte by chanting his name con-

tinuously throughout the second half. "For sure to feel this atmosphere around me is very important," added Conte.

"It's very important to feel the people is appreciating my work here in Chelsea. Me and the players, we are trying to do our best to give them the best satisfaction. "Sometimes we are able to do this, sometimes we are not able, but the will is always present."

A strike from Victor Moses and Hazard's brilliant second of the game rounded off another costly night for West Brom, who are seven points adrift of safety at the bottom of the table and lost Daniel Sturridge to a hamstring injury.

"He was distraught really because his personality and way he has worked at our place has been of the highest order," manager Alan Pardew said of the on-loan Liverpool striker, whose career has been dogged by injuries.



Chelsea manager Antonio Conte celebrates after the EPL match against West Bromwich Albion. (Reuters)

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

# Zidane relaxed as Real Madrid get ready for PSG clash

'I'm very happy. We all live for these moments. I don't feel any particular pressure'

AFP  
Madrid

Zinedine Zidane insists he is not letting the pressure get to him as he prepares his Real Madrid side for today's huge Champions League last-16 clash with Paris Saint-Germain at the Santiago Bernabeu.

"I'm very happy. We all live for these moments. I don't feel any particular pressure," a relaxed Zidane said at a press conference at Real's Valdebebas training complex yesterday.

"We have prepared as we usually do. Certainly tomorrow (Wednesday) there will be a bit more pressure than usual, but I'm going to enjoy it. My future does not bother me much just now."

Zidane has been going through the toughest period of his short managerial career, with Real fourth in La Liga, a huge 17 points behind leaders Barcelona, albeit with a game in hand.

That has led to speculation that the Frenchman's future as coach is on the line against a feared PSG side, with the two-time defending European champions putting all their hopes in the Champions League going into the first leg of this tie.

"I am just trying to get on with my work. This is my passion," said Zidane, who has won eight trophies as Real coach. "I have nothing that I need to demonstrate." The tie is a special one for the Marseille-born Zidane, as he faces a French club for the first time since being appointed Real coach in January 2016. The second leg will be in Paris on March 6.

"Playing against PSG as someone from Marseille, there has always been a rivalry there, but I'm not going to think about that. I just want a beautiful game of football."

Zidane got the full backing of Real's Brazilian left-back Marcelo, who said the former World Cup winner has a great relationship with the stars in the Madrid dressing room.

"He is a person who is very close to us and who helped us so much when he arrived here," said the 29-year-old. "He is a great coach who has done so much for this team and will keep on doing so to get things back to how they used to be."

Marcelo will be coming up against his international teammate Neymar, who he claimed ahead of the game in an interview with Brazilian television would "one day play for Real Madrid."

"Madrid fans like good players, and Neymar is a world star. Any fan would like to have Neymar in their team," he added yesterday. Real, though, are wary of the threats elsewhere



Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane during the press conference in Madrid yesterday. (Reuters)

in a PSG side also featuring the likes of Edinson Cavani and Kylian Mbappe. "Of course Neymar is a great player who is on top of his game, but we are not only thinking about him." Zidane inspired France to World Cup glory as a player, but his extraordinary career has to a large degree been defined by the Champions League.

His magnificent volleyed goal for Real Madrid in their 2002 win over Bayer Leverkusen at Hampden Park in Glasgow is one of the greatest to be scored in a European Cup final.

As such, it is up there with his brace in France's 1998 win over Brazil, his country's Euro 2000 triumph and the infamous headbutt on Marco Materazzi during the 2006 World Cup final among the most memorable moments of his playing days. He has carried on his love affair with the Champions League as a coach, from his role as assistant to Carlo Ancelotti in Real's 2014 triumph to leading Madrid to glory himself in the last two seasons.

But now Zidane's future in charge at the Santiago Bernabeu is hanging by a thread, possibly tied to the outcome of the looming showdown with this formidable Paris Saint-Germain outfit. For 18 months after his appointment in January 2016, the Frenchman could do no wrong, but a little of the magic has deserted him recently.

"This is an unprecedented situation, but we must live with it, hold our course," Zidane said in an interview with French radio station RTL aired on Mon-

day. He has won eight trophies since replacing the unpopular Rafa Benitez in the Madrid dug-out, including an unprecedented five in one calendar year in 2017. Zidane also oversaw the club's first La Liga and European Cup double since 1958 as well as a record 40-match unbeaten run.

## REAL V PSG FACTFILE

**Previous meetings**  
Real Madrid 1 PSG 0 – 2015/16 Champions League group stage  
PSG 0 Real Madrid 0 – 2015/16 Champions League group stage  
PSG 1 Real Madrid 1 – 1993/94 UEFA Cup Winners' Cup quarter-final second leg  
Real Madrid 0 PSG 1 – 1993/94 UEFA Cup Winners' Cup quarter-final first leg  
PSG 4 Real Madrid 1 – 1992/93 UEFA Cup quarter-final second leg  
Real Madrid 3 PSG 1 – 1992/93 UEFA Cup quarter-final first leg

**Group stage performances**  
Real Madrid – second in Group H behind Tottenham Hotspur  
PSG – winners of Group B ahead of Bayern Munich with group-stage record of 25 goals scored

**Leading scorers in all competitions**  
Real Madrid: Cristiano Ronaldo (23 goals)  
PSG: Neymar, Edinson Cavani (both 28 goals)

**European Cup/Champions League best performances:**  
Real Madrid – winners 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1966, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2014, 2016, 2017  
Paris Saint-Germain – semi-finals 1995

**Quick facts**  
Real Madrid have reached at least the quarter-finals in each of the last seven seasons. When they last fell in the last 16, in 2010, it was against another French side in Lyon.  
Cristiano Ronaldo is one goal away from reaching the 100 mark for Real Madrid in the Champions League.

Paris coach Unai Emery won just five of 20 games against Real Madrid as a coach when in charge of Almeria, Valencia and Sevilla.

But now they stand fourth in La Liga, at risk of finishing off the podium in their domestic league for the first time since 2004. Finishing second behind Tottenham Hotspur in their Champions League group also exposed them to this tougher draw. The man born and raised

in a tough neighbourhood of Marseille needs the tonic of a win over the Parisian aristocrats.

"We also must not dismiss everything we have done because of our form at the moment," he told RTL, mindful that recent improved results in La Liga have not completely shaken away the doubts.

"This is not some other club – the slightest negative thing here and the media make a song and dance out of it."

Zidane last month revealed that he had signed a new contract at the Bernabeu until 2020, and the respect with which he is held by those within the club, the supporters and the media means there has been no campaign calling for his head.

President Florentino Perez cannot make Zidane the scapegoat for the lowering of standards as he did with Benitez before. But, equally, Zidane is fully aware that coaches at the Bernabeu do not have long shelf-lives.

Since Vicente del Bosque was unceremoniously sacked in 2003, Real have appointed a new coach 13 times. The longest-serving in that time has been Jose Mourinho, who survived for three seasons. When asked last month if he felt able to turn things around, he replied: "If I thought I could not, I would leave tomorrow."

But to RTL he added: "I like what I do. Not everyone can do this. I am making the most of it, I know it won't last forever."

Meanwhile PSG have omitted veteran midfielder Thiago Motta from their squad for the trip to Madrid yesterday.

OPINION

# Mourinho backs VAR technology amid mixed response

Reuters  
Manchester

Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho supports the use of the video assistant referee (VAR) system despite the mixed response it has generated since its debut in English football in the FA Cup last month.

United play their first match with VAR when they travel to Huddersfield Town for their FA Cup fifth round clash on Saturday and Mourinho stressed that the technology had to be embraced, although it needed to iron out some issues. "Of course they (VAR) need adjustments," Mourinho told the club's website (www.manutd.com).

"They need to make sure they don't change the dynamic of the game too much, the emotion of the game too much – people waiting a couple of minutes to know if they can jump (and celebrate) because it was a goal.

"But from my professional perspective, I like the feeling of a right decision coming. It's a penalty or not a penalty, it's handball or not handball, it's a red card or not a red card. I think a fair decision is a feeling that I like."

The technology is also being trialled around the world, however critics have pointed out the length of the reviews while some

supporters in the stadium are unhappy at being left in the dark about replays that TV viewers can watch over again.

English clubs are not alone in experiencing teething trouble related to the use of the system, with VAR decisions seemingly only adding to the confusion rather than stopping it in Italy's Serie A.

VAR induced more controversy on Monday when the Portuguese football federation (FPF) said it had been wrongly used to disallow a goal at the weekend.

Backing the referees, Mourinho added: "They want to perform the best they can, they don't like to make mistakes... so if the referees are happy with technological support, then yes, let's go for the VAR."



LA LIGA

# Seedorf suffers losing start as Deportivo lose to Real Betis 1-0

Reuters  
Madrid

Netherlands great Clarence Seedorf got off on the wrong foot in his first game in charge of struggling Deportivo La Coruna as his side lost 1-0 at home to Real Betis in La Liga on Monday.

Betis forward Lorenzo Moron kicked on from his dream debut against Villarreal last weekend by netting the only goal of the game in the 55th minute, his third strike in his second appearance in the Betis first team.

The Spaniard, known as Loren, slid in to meet a low cross and scuffed it into the net off the foot of hapless Depor goalkeeper Ruben Martinez.

Deportivo rallied after going behind and striker Florin Andone hit the post and in added time fired just wide of goal, moments after team mate Celso Borges had come agonisingly close to scoring for the home side.

Boos and whistles rang around the Riazor stadium at full time following Depor's a fourth defeat in six games in 2018. They are 19th in the standings, three points adrift of the safety zone, while Betis climbed to eighth.

Seedorf, a Champions League winner four times as a player, with Ajax Amsterdam, Real Ma-

drid and AC Milan (twice), was the surprise choice last week to succeed the sacked Cristobal Parralo given his limited experience as a manager, having had only brief stints at Milan and Chinese side Shenzhen FC.

However, despite Monday's defeat, the enthusiastic Dutchman felt his Depor side had shown signs of life. "Right now we have to look at the things that we did well. It was a difficult game because they use the ball very well, but the team always stayed organised, leaving little space for them to create proper chances," Seedorf told reporters.

"The team fought well, we played as a team and this is the path we need to follow. We wanted a different result but there are more games to come and we are convinced this is the way to go. We have already seen a change in energy and attitude."

Betis forward Loren said he was still in dreamland after adding to his brace in the 2-1 win over Villarreal on his debut.

"I'm still dreaming from my debut and it has continued to this week but the most important thing is how my team mates have welcomed me and how well they are working as it's not just about goals," he said.

"We had to suffer a little for the three points today but that makes them taste even better!"

## FOOTBALL/AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

# Baghdad's double seals Al Sadd win over Al Wasl

LATE GOAL IN DOHA HELPS ESTHEGLAL OF IRAN CLINCH A 2-2 DRAW AGAINST QATAR'S AL RAYYAN



Al Sadd's Baghdad Bounedjah celebrates scoring against Al Wasl in Dubai yesterday. At right, he is congratulated by coach Jesualdo Ferreira after the match.



Al Rayyan's Rodrigo Tabata is congratulated by teammate Sebastian Soria after his goal against Esthglal. PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil and agencies

By Sports Reporter  
Dubai/Doha

Baghdad Bounedjah underlined his tremendous importance for Al Sadd by powering the Qatar giants to a 2-1 win over the UAE's Al Wasl in their AFC Champions League Group C clash yesterday.

Having only made his return to action last week after more than two and a half months after suffering a fracture in late November, the Algerian struck twice late in the second half to help the 2011 continental champions gain three points at the Zabeel Stadium in Dubai.

It marked a significant first victory for a Qatari side in the Emirates since the illegal blockade was imposed on the country last June by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain with support from Egypt.

On Monday, Qatar's Al Gharafa had fallen to a 3-2 defeat against the UAE's Al Jazira in Abu Dhabi marking the first visit by a team from Qatar to the UAE.

The Asian Football Confederation had earlier rejected demands by the UAE and Saudi football federations to have their Champions League matches involving Qatari sides played on neutral venues.

Bounedjah, who was introduced as a substitute in the second half by Al Sadd coach Jesualdo Ferreira, lived up



to what was expected of him by making an immediate impact on the game.

Al Wasl were returning to the continental competition after a decade and

their inexperience was clearly on display, although it was they who scored first, in the 26th minute by Fabio Lima.

Lima advanced into the area from

the right flank and scored past Al Sadd goalkeeper Saad al-Sheeb with a low shot from a tight angle after hoodwinking two defenders.

It was the versatile Brazilian's 100th goal for Al Wasl since he joined them in 2014, but the hosts thereafter found the Al Sadd defence too tough to crack.

Bounedjah had a first crack at the Al Wasl goal with an overhead kick in the 70th minute but eventually found the target in the 79th minute when he connected a sublime Xavi pass with a shot on the turn.

In the final minute of the game, Bounedjah was on target again, after he got on the end of a cross by substitute Akram Afif which the Al Wasl defence failed deal with. The striker finished on the half-volley to seal an important victory for the former champions.

"I am very pleased with the victory especially it is our first match of the tournament," Ferreira said. "We have a team full of capable players who also don't lack in confidence," he added.

He also had a word of praise for Bounedjah.

"He is one of our key players who never fails to deliver. He was unfortunately injured in a QNB Stars League game in November but he has made a tremendous recovery which will be a boost for us as the season progresses," the Portuguese added.

Al Sadd welcome Persepolis to Doha next week while Al Wasl travel to Qarshi in Uzbekistan to face Nasaf.

Meanwhile in Doha, Al Rayyan captain Rodrigo Tabata had a mixed

evening as his side played out an entertaining 2-2 draw against Iran's Esthglal at Jassim bin Hamad Stadium in Group D.

Two-time AFC Player of the Year Server Djeparov found space inside Al Rayyan's box and sent a pacey cross that was deflected off Tabata and into his own net to hand Esthglal the lead inside six minutes.

Tabata shortly made amends, sending a pinpoint delivery from a free-kick to find Abderrazzak Hamdallah. The Moroccan directed his header accurately to beat goalkeeper Seyed Hosseini and bring Al Rayyan level in the 18th minute.

The duo combined again 10 minutes later to turn the tie around. This time Hamed-Allah was the creator as he cut inside from the left flank and laid off a pass for Tabata who applied a first-time finish from inside the box, leaving Hosseini helpless.

Al Rayyan were reduced to 10 men for the final 10 minutes after Tabata was dismissed for a late challenge on Pejman Montazeri.

Esthglal took advantage of their numerical superiority to equalise two minutes from time as Ali Ghorbani headed home Omid Ebrahimi's cross from the right wing.

Esthglal face Saudi champions Al Hilal next while Al Rayyan travel to the UAE to play Al Ain.

## BOTTOMLINE

## Koora Time offers football for everyone

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The Qatar Football Association (QFA) and Qatar Shell celebrated this year's National Sport Day at Katara with their award-winning corporate social responsibility programme "Koora Time". With over 7,000 people attending, participants of all age groups actively engaged in a fun-filled day of football activities.

The all-day event offered visitors a variety of football activities, including a 'head-to-head' dribbling challenge, a 'Dive and Save' goalkeeping competition, a virtual reality goal keeper game, open play football and aerobics classes.

Koora Time is an initiative developed by Qatar Shell in partnership with QFA. The programme is designed to improve the health and wellbeing of young people in Qatar through football. Since its launch in March 2013, the programme has benefited over 17,500 children across Qatar. Last year's programme saw a significant reduction in Body Mass Index (BMI) by 80% of participants. BMI is a measure of body fat based on height and weight.



Officials and participants pose at the National Sport Day celebrations at Katara yesterday. At right, kids in action.

Commenting on the occasion, Khalid al-Kuwari, Director of Marketing and Communications at the Qatar Football Association said: "This year's Koora Time activities which we are organising alongside Qatar Shell provides various fun activities for chil-

dren, adults and families and were planned to be suitable for all ages so all members of the community can join in the fun."

He added: "Our participation in sports day is a real opportunity for us to express our love for sports and our

aim of involving the community in our events and activities. The fun-packed day emphasises our passion for football which is precisely why we have organised most of the activities to be football-related this year. We invite everyone to take part in Koora Time's



activities in Katara this year and guarantee that everyone will have a wonderful time."

Wejdan al-Malki, CSR Manager at Qatar Shell, said: "Koora Time helps children develop positive habits such as healthy eating and regular exercise that will lead to a healthier lifestyle. National Sport Day is the perfect time to emphasise the importance of good health, particularly among children who represent Qatar's future. We are especially proud to partner with the Qatar Football Association to organise these Koora Time events. We hope that everyone will take the message from

National Sport Day that healthy living can be both beneficial and fun."

In recognition for its positive impact on the health of youth, Koora Time has been the recipient of numerous recognition awards including the 'Sports Industry Award' for Best CSR Initiative in 2014 and 2016, the 'CSR Award Qatar' for Best CSR Impact Initiative in 2015, the 'Dar Al Sharq Corporate Social Responsibility Award' for the Best Sports Initiative in 2014, the 'AFC Dream of Asia Award' in 2014, 2016 & 2017 in the area of social responsibility, and the 'QFA Awards' for Best CSR Programme in 2017.