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Friday, January 11, 2019
Jumada 15, 1440 AH

GULF TIMES SPORT



TENNIS

**Federer to launch
defence against
unseeded Istomin**

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FOOTBALL / AFC ASIAN CUP REACTION

Patient approach helped Qatar beat Lebanon: Sanchez

'The opposition was very well organised but the players did very well in the last 30 minutes'



Almoez Ali scores Qatar's second goal against Lebanon in Al Ain on Wednesday. At bottom, coach Sanchez.

AFC
Al Ain

Felix Sanchez praised his side's patient approach as Qatar made a winning start to the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 with a 2-0 victory over Lebanon in Al Ain on Wednesday evening, which came courtesy of two goals in the final 25 minutes of the game.

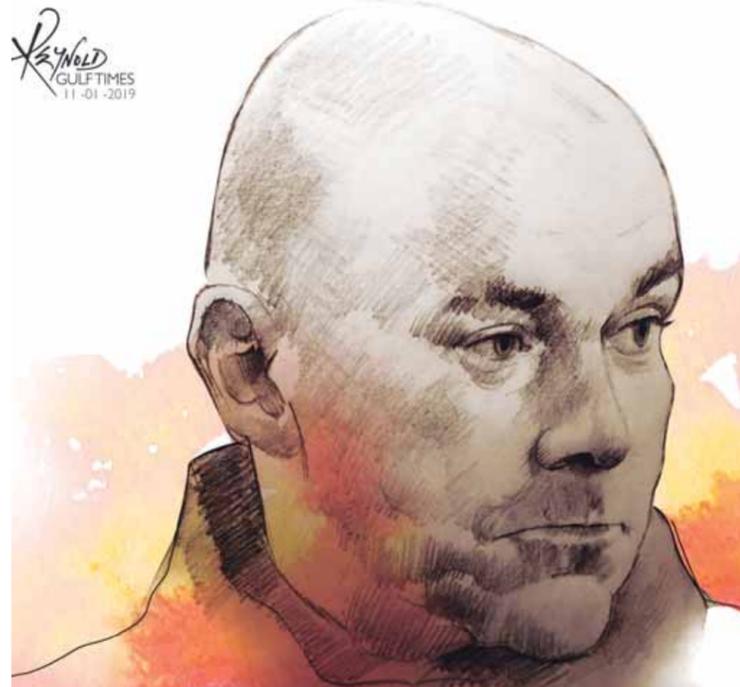
Bassam al-Rawi and Almoez Ali scored for the Gulf side as they joined Saudi Arabia at the top of Group E after the first round of matches, with the pair's goals capping an assured display in the second period by the Qataris.

Sanchez's side were made to work for the points against a Lebanon team that was disciplined and well-drilled and the performance of their opponents came as little surprise to the Spanish coach.

"We knew that this scenario could happen in the game," said Sanchez. "Lebanon is a very competitive team and in every game they lose, they lose only by one goal and it's difficult to score against them. We knew this would be the scenario."

"They were patient and this was one of the keys. We found the chances and it was good for us to be able to score. There are many games that this will happen in this competition because all the teams are really well prepared and have strength and

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it's not easy to achieve good results."

Al-Rawi's 65th minute curling free-kick opened the scoring before Ali tapped in from

close range to safeguard all three points 11 minutes from time, with Qatar growing in stature as the game progressed.

"The other team was very

well organised and many times we reached the last third we were not able to shoot, or they stopped us or we were not able to cross," said Sanchez.

"In the first half when we got into the last third we needed to finish the action and in the second half the players understood and were able to find gaps and to finish."

"When you start a tournament and play in a game like this, things are more difficult. The opposition was very well organised but the players did very well in the last 30 minutes."

Lebanon coach Miodrag Radulovic was left frustrated that his team came out of the game with nothing to show for a disciplined display, with the outcome ultimately hinging on Qatar's opening goal.

"It's very difficult to play because it's the first game," he said. "Lebanon have waited 19 years to play in such a competition and my players don't have the possibility to play in such a strong competition."

"I knew how we have to play against Qatar and we closed all the strong points of our opponents."

"When it's 1-0 it's totally different. My players lost confidence and it's very difficult to continue in this kind of game and this is exactly what's happened. It's a different game when you score 1-0 on 65 minutes."

"They didn't have any chances in the first half, the first 60 minutes, and this is exactly how I wanted to play. I'm satisfied with how my players played."

SPOTLIGHT

Jordan first to qualify for last 16, Bahrain and India beaten

DPA
Abu Dhabi

Jordan became the first team to make the knockouts, while Thailand defeated Bahrain 1-0 and hosts UAE beat luckless India 2-0 in the Asian Cup yesterday.

Khalfan Mubarak's goal against the run of play and Ali Mabkhout's late strike put hosts UAE top of the group on four points ahead of their final match with Thailand, on three, in Al Ain on Monday.

India, also on three, will rue a series of missed chances as victory in a contest they dominated would have taken them through.

Thailand defeated bottom team Bahrain in Dubai under the guidance of interim boss Sirisak Yodyadthai, who took the reins after previous boss Milovan Rajevac was sacked following a 4-1 disaster in their opener against India.

Elsewhere, Jordan ensured automatic progress with a 2-0 win over Syria in Al Ain thanks to first-half goals from Mousa Suleiman and Tareq Khattab.

Syria are not yet eliminated on one point having drawn with Palestine, who play Australia today. UAE coach Alberto Zaccheroni persisted with striker Ali Mabkhout, who spurned various opportunities in the disappointing opening draw with Bahrain, and his faith was justified with a goal and an assist.

Mabkhout coolly killed the game in the last minute by collecting Ali Hassan Salmin's chip and finishing well.

"It was positive in the second half, but what matters to me is the development from one game to the next one."

The players today have demonstrated very good spirit and will to win," Zaccheroni said.

"We need to move up from one game to another and this is valid for all teams to win the championship."

Sunil Chhetri, who bagged a brace against Thailand, missed an immediate chance to equalize as India endured a torrid time in front of goal.

With the game still scoreless, Ashique Kuruniyan was denied one-on-one by Khalid Essa and the keeper also reacted well to save a header from Chhetri.

India watched in agony as Udanta Singh hit the underside of the bar after a smart one-two with Chhetri and a Mohamed Gharib clearance struck the frame of his own goal in added time.

"We had chances to score but didn't take them," said goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh. "It happens in football."

India did have some fortune as Ismail al-Hammadi's shot rebounded from the woodwork onto Singh and flew just wide of the post.

"They should make the goals a bit bigger, I think," joked India manager Stephen Constantine, who felt his side "created enough chances, especially in the first half, to win two games."

"I just feel we didn't convert and paid. A couple of brilliant saves from their keeper and a couple we should have scored."

Jordan dominated the opening half against Syria and took a deserved lead when Suleiman deflected in Yousef Rawshdeh's drive in the 26th minute.

Khattab doubled the advantage by heading in a short corner shortly before the break and there was no further scoring in the second period. Jordan can guarantee first place with a draw against Palestine in their final group game on Tuesday. Songkrasin Chanathip scored the only goal, volleying in Tristan Do's cross just before the hour, to lift a new-look Thailand over Bahrain.

Interim coach Yodyadthai made several changes to the starting 11 and was rewarded, though Bahrain were the better side in the first half.

Group A
United Arab Emirates 2 (Mubarak 41, Mabkhout 88) India 0
Bahrain 0 Thailand 1 (Chanathip 58)

Group B
Jordan 2 (Suleiman 26, Khattab 43) Syria 0



Jordan's defender Anas Bani Yaseen (L) vies for the ball with Syria's forward Omar Khribin during their Asian Cup match in Al Ain yesterday.

LEAGUE CUP

City hit nine past Burton to cruise towards final

City is guaranteed of a final meeting against Tottenham or Chelsea on February 24

AFP
Manchester, United Kingdom

Holders Manchester City can look forward to defending the League Cup in next month's final at Wembley as Gabriel Jesus struck four goals in a 9-0 thrashing of Burton Albion in their semi-final, first leg on Wednesday night.

Kevin de Bruyne, Oleksandr Zinchenko, Phil Foden, Kyle Walker and Riyad Mahrez were also on target against Nigel Clough's League One side as City ensured their visit to the Pirelli Stadium on January 23 is a mere formality. "Of course we are already in the final. We have to play second leg and we will take it seriously. Happy to be in the final again," said City boss Pep Guardiola. "It's not easy to play this kind of game. We spoke (before the game) to take it seriously, we started well."

After also thrashing Rotherham 7-0 in the FA Cup on Sunday with a much-changed side, Guardiola was able to again hand a rest to a number of his key players but named a strong side with De Bruyne continuing his comeback from injury. And the Belgian set the tone for the evening by heading City into a fifth-minute lead as he timed his run into the box perfectly to head home David Silva's cross. Clough admitted before the game it would take a "miracle" for Burton to blunt the Premier League champions' might over two legs.

"We didn't expect anything less given the gulf in class between the teams, we actually feared it could be more," said Clough, a two-time League Cup winner as a player under his father Brian Clough at Nottingham Forest. "We've made history with the club getting to the last four of a Cup competition. Once we saw the three teams (in the semi-finals) it was always going to be trouble."

So it proved, but the visitors missed a glorious chance to get straight back on level terms when Marcus Harness blasted over Lucas Akins's cross when



Manchester City's Gabriel Jesus (second left) heads the ball to score his third goal during the League Cup first leg semi-final against Burton Albion. (AFP)

completely unmarked inside the penalty box. It took City until the half hour mark to double their advantage, but a glut of three goals in seven minutes followed to put the tie to bed before the break.

Jesus headed home his first from close range after Bradley Collins had denied Leroy Sane before the Brazilian slotted home Silva's cushioned pass via the inside of the post. "Players like me

want to play more, to help the team, and we went out there to win," said Jesus.

City didn't need any luck, but still got some when Zinchenko's intended cross then looped over Collins to make it 4-0. Other sides may have slacked off in the second period, but with competition for places so fierce among Guardiola's side, the hosts were ruthless to match the Catalan's biggest ever win as a coach.

Jesus powered home a header to com-

plete his second hat-trick of the season.

De Bruyne was then replaced by home favourite Foden, who was surprisingly left out the starting XI, just before the hour mark. It took just four minutes for the 18-year-old to score his third City goal as he profited from the rebound after Collins did well to parry Jesus's first effort.

Jesus did soon have his fourth with a delicate finish from Sane's cross and

City's dominance was summed up when right-back Kyle Walker strode forward to fire home his side's eighth of the evening.

Mahrez made it nine seven minutes from time and those City fans still in the Etihad cried for a historic 10th. But that was the only thing City fell short of on the night with a final meeting against Tottenham or Chelsea on February 24 guaranteed.

Mourinho free for Real return as United pay compensation

London: Jose Mourinho is available for a dramatic return to Real Madrid after Manchester United paid him a reported £15m (\$19m) in compensation following his sacking last month, according to British media yesterday.

The *Daily Mail* reports that a source close to Mourinho – whose contract was due to run till the end of the 2019/20 campaign with the option of an extra season – has revealed that compensation has been paid. *The Sun* reports that United agreed to the payment after his disappointing two-and-a-half-year stint at Old Trafford following a meeting between Mourinho's agent Jorge Mendes and United executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward.

The pay-out leaves the 55-year-old Portuguese free to be considered for Madrid if the club decide to dismiss under-pressure coach Santiago Solari. Mourinho's time at Real between 2010-2013 – which brought a league title and a Spanish Cup but saw them largely play second fiddle to Barcelona – ended as it did at United and Chelsea, with bad results and discord in the dressing room.

However, Real president Florentino Perez remains a fan and with the club 10 points behind La Liga leaders Barca and outside the Champions League places, Solari is under intense scrutiny.

Meanwhile, Mourinho has ruled himself out of the vacant job at Benfica, saying he has no intention of coaching in his native Portugal for the time being. "I haven't received an offer and even if I did, obviously the president of Benfica and the club itself would be the first to know my decision," he told the website of the *Correio da Manha* newspaper.

"(But) I think I can say that today, I don't have any intention of coming back to work in Portugal," he said. "I am fine at the moment. Today, I am not an option for Benfica, nothing more than that."

SPOTLIGHT

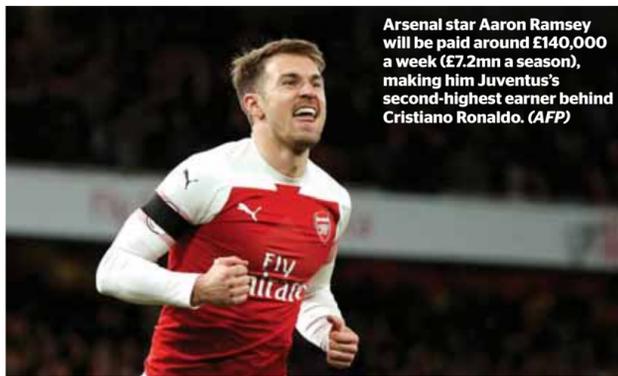
Ramsey agrees deal with Juventus worth £36mn

By Fabrizio Romano
The Guardian

Aaron Ramsey has agreed a five-year deal with Juventus worth £36mn and will join the Italian champions on a free transfer at the end of the season. The midfielder has been discussing a move for weeks and will leave Arsenal after 10 years at the club.

It had been clear the Wales international would move in the summer and Juventus had been the frontrunners to secure the 28-year-old's signature. Ramsey will be paid around £140,000 a week (£7.2mn a season), making him Juventus's second-highest earner behind Cristiano Ronaldo but ahead Paulo Dybala and Douglas Costa.

Juventus, who have won the past seven Serie A titles, signed Ronaldo for €100mn last summer and are nine points clear of Napoli in second place after 19 games. They have reached two of the last four Champions League finals, albeit losing



Arsenal star Aaron Ramsey will be paid around £140,000 a week (£7.2mn a season), making him Juventus's second-highest earner behind Cristiano Ronaldo. (AFP)

both, to Barcelona in 2015 and Real Madrid two years later. They are in the last 16 of this season's competition, where they face Atlético Madrid.

The Juventus manager, Max Allegri, and the director Fabio Paratici are huge

admirers of Ramsey, who is likely to be given a place in the Juventus starting XI, most likely playing with Miralem Pjanic and Blaise Matuidi in a three-man midfield. He is likely to replace one of Emre Can, Rodrigo Bentancur and Sami

Khedira, with the latter possibly leaving the club in the summer.

Ramsey signed for Arsenal from Cardiff for £4.8m. He has played 252 top-flight games for the club, scoring 52 goals. He won three FA Cups, scoring the winning goal in the 2014 and 2017 finals. He played arguably the best football of his career during Euro 2016 when Wales reached the semi-finals, although he was suspended for the last-four game when Portugal beat Chris Coleman's team 2-0.

Ramsey has had his injury problems but Juventus are delighted to have secured him on a free transfer, while Arsenal will regret seeing a player in the prime of his career leave under these circumstances. With Arsenal choosing to renew the contract of Mesut Ozil – another star whose deal was due to expire this summer – they put themselves in a position where they could not re-sign Ramsey too. The Arsenal manager, Unai Emery, also had major reservations about both Ozil and Ramsey fitting into his plans and the style he wants to play.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arnautovic asks West Ham to let him move to China

By Ed Aarons
The Guardian

Marko Arnautovic wants West Ham to accept the £35mn bid from an unnamed Chinese club to allow him to "challenge for titles" but has been told he is not for sale. The Austria forward moved to east London in July 2017 for £20mn, plus an additional £5mn in potential add-ons, and is West Ham's joint-top scorer this season with eight goals in all competitions.

Manuel Pellegrini yesterday dismissed suggestions the 29-year-old could leave the club this month but having admitted in November the forward would like to test himself in the Champions League, Arnautovic's brother Danijel, who also acts as his agent, released a statement which asks for them to allow him to move to the Chinese Super League.

"West Ham bought Marko for peanuts. They paid £20mn for him, which is nothing in the current market," read the statement. "They bought him to keep them in the Premier League last season and he did that. He took every award at the club; best player, signing of the season and the players' award. Now West Ham have a fantastic offer. It is close to double what they paid for him. He wants to go to a new market and challenge for titles. This is what he wants. It is his great desire that West Ham accept the offer from China."

Reports have stated the offer – which, it is understood, would mean Arnautovic earns approximately £40mn over his four-year contract, a vast upgrade on his current wage of £90,000 a week – is from reigning champions Shanghai SIPG, although their permitted allocation of three overseas players is filled by former Chelsea midfielder Oscar and his fellow Brazilians Hulk



and Elkeson.

Pellegrini underlined his determination to keep Arnautovic before West Ham's meeting with Arsenal tomorrow, with the club later issuing a statement which read: "Marko has a contract and we fully expect him to honour it. He is not for sale."

It is understood West Ham will not consider selling him this month because of the difficulties they may face in replacing him. Stoke are also believed to have a sell-on clause that would entitle them to 20% of any future transfer fee, with his contract due to expire in 2022. "Those are all rumours," said Pellegrini. "We know that we have a very good player in Marko, a lot of clubs may want him to play for them. At the moment we have no news about him. I don't want to talk about things that might happen. Marko in this moment is a player of our team, players of his quality and other players like Declan Rice, Felipe Anderson, other clubs will want them but that is one thing. I don't think they will go. I want to keep him, of course, but you never know what might happen in the future."

FOCUS

Figo, Kaka seek 'promise' of football in Pakistan

AFP
Karachi

Portuguese great Luis Figo and Brazilian star Kaka yesterday vowed to help develop the "great promise" of football in Pakistan, a country obsessed with cricket and twice banned from international football.

The two legends – who both played for Spanish club Real Madrid – are in Pakistan for a day-long visit as part of the World Soccer Stars tour, aimed at grooming nascent talent through exhibition matches and coaching clinics.

The 2000 Ballon d'Or winner Figo, wielding a cricket bat in a nod to the game's popularity in Pakistan, told reporters in the southern port city of Karachi that he was "excited" to be there. "There is a great promise of football in Pakistan so we are here to help develop the game," said Figo, who also played for Barcelona before retiring in 2009.

Kaka, himself carrying a cricket ball, said the pair were "committed" to promoting football globally. "We... have a good impression of Pakistan," added the 2007 Ballon d'Or winner, who also played



Pakistani football team captain Saddam Hussain (centre) presents a jersey to former Portuguese great Luis Figo (left) and Brazilian star Kaka in Karachi. (AFP)

for AC Milan and retired in 2017.

Pakistan boasted a top 10 place in Asian football until the early 1970s, but a lack of government support and poor infra-

structure have seen them sink to 199 in the FIFA rankings. Pakistan was banned in 1995 and again in 2017 over violating FIFA's rule that all federations must be

free of any government and judicial interference in their respective countries.

The most recent ban was lifted in 2018, but Pakistan is on the verge of a third strike after the head of its federation refused to accept the results of a controversial leadership election held last month. Cricket is king in the South Asian country of more than 200mn people, which has never qualified for the FIFA World Cup.

But a 2017 visit by eight international stars led by Brazilian legend Ronaldinho proved the game is gaining popularity, with younger generations adoring the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi and Luca Modric. Figo and Kaka backed FIFA's stance of increasing the number of World Cup teams from 32 to 48 in the 2026 event to be co-hosted by the US, Mexico and Canada. It means "more players and more opportunities", Figo said, while Kaka hoped Pakistan would seize the chance and appear in the World Cup "soon". Pakistan football team captain Saddam Hussain also met Figo and Kaka, while a host of young fans received autographs and took selfies with the two players. The two stars are expected to return for exhibition matches and coaching clinics from April 23-26 this year.

SPOTLIGHT

Guingamp stun PSG in League Cup quarters

Thierry Henry's Monaco keep their coach's hopes of a first trophy alive

AFP
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain saw their 43-match winning run in domestic cup competitions come to an end as Thomas Tuchel's men suffered a shock 2-1 home defeat by Ligue 1 bottom club Guingamp in the French League Cup quarter-finals on Wednesday night. The visitors were awarded three penalties at the Parc des Princes in a dramatic second half, as PSG failed in their bid for a sixth straight League Cup title. It was only a second defeat in all competitions this season for the capital club, after a 3-2 loss to Liverpool at Anfield in the Champions League last September.

Guingamp, who have won just two league games all season, join Monaco, Strasbourg and Bordeaux in the semi-finals.

"We came here to win and we know it's very difficult here," said Marcus Thuram, the son of 1998 World Cup winner Lilian Thuram, who scored the winner. "We know that in the Cup anything can happen... We knew how to hinder PSG."

Neymar broke the deadlock in the 63rd minute after Thuram missed from the spot, but Guingamp rallied, with Thuram's successful injury-time penalty snatching victory with a shootout looming. "We played with too much confidence, we were not hungry enough to finish the match," admitted PSG coach Thomas Tuchel. "It's very hard to lose with three penalties. I was angry with the second one, I can see the VAR 100 times, it's not a penalty."

Tuchel named a strong starting XI including Kylian Mbappe, Neymar and Angel Di Maria, but a drab first half in the capital failed to produce a single shot on target from either side. The reigning French champions had extended their cup winning streak at the weekend against fifth-tier Pontivy, but Guingamp were awarded a penalty on the hour mark when Ludovic Blas was tripped by PSG full-back Thomas Meunier.

Forward Thuram blazed his effort from 12 yards well over the top of the crossbar, and it appeared as though the opportunity of an upset had passed Guingamp by when Neymar headed home a Meunier cross less than two minutes later.

But the away side managed to stay in the game and were handed another penalty nine minutes from time when Marcus Coco was bundled over by Juan Bernat, and Congolese international Yeni Ngbakoto made no mistake after a lengthy VAR



Guingamp's Yeni Ngbakoto (centre) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Paris Saint-Germain in the French League Cup quarter-finals. (AFP)

delay. With the game set for penalties after 90 minutes, Guingamp landed a decisive blow on the counter-attack, as Thilo Kehrer fouled Thuram, and this time the 21-year-old squeezed the ball under the diving Alphonse Areola in the PSG net.

Earlier on Wednesday, Monaco goalkeeper Loic Badiashile scored the winning penalty in a marathon shootout against Rennes.

Monaco, runners-up in the past two seasons, salvaged a 1-1 draw after normal time thanks to Rony Lopes' second-half equaliser, before Badiashile's heroics as he also saved three spot-kicks.

Thierry Henry's young team are floundering in Ligue 1, sitting second-bottom and five points from safety, but managed to keep their coach's hopes of a first trophy

alive at the Stade Louis II. "That's exactly how we want to play," said the former Arsenal and France striker.

"Sometimes we heard the crowd were unhappy, but we got the ball back on the ground and we played. Finally we reacted after conceding a goal. Before we didn't know how to do it. This time, we did."

Monaco were the better side for the majority of an uneventful first half, with Moussa Sylla twice going close, but went into the break a goal down after Benjamin Bourigeaud swept Rennes ahead on the half-hour mark after a clever pass from Hatem Ben Arfa.

Henry was grateful to have Lopes back in the starting line-up for the first time since September 2 after a thigh injury, and the Portuguese forward tapped in Julien

Serrano's low cross to level in the 54th minute.

Kamil Glik and new signing Naldo both missed chances to win the tie for Monaco on penalties, but 20-year-old Badiashile slotted home the 22nd spot-kick to send them through after Rennes' keeper Tomas Koubek had blazed over.

FRENCH LEAGUE CUP RESULTS

Quarter-finals: Monaco 1 (Lopes 54) Rennes 1 (Bourigeaud 30) Monaco won 8-7 on penalties; Bordeaux 1 (Kalu 70) Le Havre 0; Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Neymar 63) Guingamp 2 (Ngbakoto 81-pen, Thuram 90+3-pen)

Played Tuesday: Lyon 1 (Traore 49) Strasbourg 2 (Ajourque 26-pen, Kone 52)

COPA DEL REY

Vinicius inspires Real Madrid to much-needed win

AFP
Girona, Spain

Vinicius Junior starred and Real Madrid steadied the ship as a 3-0 win over Leganes on Wednesday night put them on the brink of the Copa del Rey quarter-finals. Vinicius, the 18-year-old Brazilian signed by Madrid last summer, capped an electric display at the Santiago Bernabeu with a stunning volley, his third goal for the club and the team's third of the night.

By then, Sergio Ramos had converted a first-half penalty and Lucas Vazquez doubled the advantage to set Madrid on their way to a much-needed first victory of 2019. It will take a seismic comeback for Leganes to overturn the deficit in next week's second leg but more important to coach Santiago Solari was the rhythm regained, following two La Liga games without a victory.

The home crowd, who had whistled and waved white handkerchiefs on Sunday after the loss to Real Sociedad, were also treated to the sight of Brahim Diaz making his debut, the 19-year-old coming off the bench following his move from Manchester City.

Vinicius was the shining light, however. The striker was alive to every ball in the final third and his finish, a sweet shot with his body off balance, was a triumph for technical talent. "He is taking big steps," Solari said afterwards. "He has always had the ability but to develop it and show it in the Bernabeu, alongside so many great players, speaks of his confidence and his courage."

Vinicius had been at the centre of things last weekend too after being denied a controversial penalty during the second half

of Real Sociedad's shock win. It was Madrid, however, who were the beneficiaries of a marginal decision this time as Alvaro Odriozola tumbled out of a tussle with Gerard Gumbau and Ramos made no mistake.

Leganes had started brighter and could have been ahead had Martin Braithwaite been more precise with his finishing or quicker to a Gumbau pass across goal. Instead, Madrid doubled their lead in the second half when Karim Benzema latched onto an underhit backpass from Bustinza and teed up Vinicius.

He slid in Vazquez to finish. Vinicius then got the goal his performance deserved as Odriozola floated a cross to the back post. Back-peddalling, the teenager adjusted his feet before swivelling into an acrobatic shot, the ball flying into left-hand corner.

Earlier, Antoine Griezmann helped Atletico Madrid edge towards the last eight as they took a valuable away goal from a 1-1 draw with Girona.

Griezmann's early shot found its way in off both the crossbar and then goalkeeper Gorka Iraizoz but Girona hit back before half-time through Anthony Lozano. Neither side could find a winner at Montilivi but Atletico will be the happier, with the second leg at home still to come next week.

COPA DEL REY RESULTS

Last 16, first leg: Girona 1 (Lozano 33) Atletico Madrid 1 (Griezmann 8); Getafe 1 (Rodriguez Diaz 90+1) Valladolid 0; Villarreal 2 (Toko Ekambi 84, Bacca 88) Espanyol 2 (Darder 14, Lopez 70); Real Madrid 3 (Ramos 44-pen, Lucas Vazquez 68, Vinicius Junior 77) Leganes 0

Played Tuesday: Sporting Gijon 2 (Noblejas 34, Blackman 79) Valencia 1 (Parejo 45)



Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior celebrates after scoring against Leganes in Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid on Wednesday. (Reuters)

QATAR'S BEIN RESUMES SERVICE IN EGYPT

Cairo: Qatar broadcasting giant beIN said yesterday it will resume its service in Egypt, days after pulling the plug over a dispute with its only cable network in the country. Doha-based BeIN, which broadcasts several major sporting events, has been on the frontline of a diplomatic rift between Qatar and regional powers including Egypt.

But two days after announcing it was

cutting its service to Egypt's CNE, BeIN said it had resolved the dispute over commercial terms. "BeIN SPORTS is pleased to announce that Cable Network Egypt (CNE) has now signed an agreement for the carriage of beIN on its network," the media group said.

CNE also confirmed in a statement that beIN's sports service had resumed. BeIN provides several sports via CNE

including the English Premier League, Champions League, major tennis tournaments, NBA and Formula One. It is thought up to 300,000 viewers used the service.

"We are delighted that fans across Egypt can now, once again, have access to the best and most exciting sports and entertainment in the world," beIN said in a statement. Since June 2017, a group of

countries including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have led a political and economic boycott of Qatar.

During the diplomatic crisis beIN has launched a \$1-billion compensation claim against Saudi broadcasters, who it accuses of playing a central role in a vast piracy operation by illegally showing hundreds of live sports programmes.

FOCUS

PSV Eindhoven's coach Van Bommel praises Aspire Zone's professionalism

PSV Eindhoven's head coach Mark van Bommel has praised the work of Aspire Zone, saying that the professionalism of the sports sector in Qatar has made him excited for the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Van Bommel, who has brought PSV Eindhoven to Doha for winter training at Aspire Zone's world-class facilities, took time out to speak to the media yesterday about his team, the Asian Cup 2019, and what he expects to come in 2022, when Qatar hosts the first World Cup to be held in an Arab state.

Excerpts
On Aspire Zone and training in Qatar: For our winter camp, we have to come to Qatar during the winter season in Europe and benefit from the awesome world-class facilities at Aspire Zone. The hotel is luxurious, food is good, weather is perfect, and the beaches in Qatar are outstanding.

On PSV winning the Dutch Eredivisie Champions League this year: It won't be easy because we won a lot of games, 16 out of 17. It will be a tight game until the end with a lot of intense games. We have to go to Amsterdam, we tried to win all the games, almost every game but that is almost impossible.

On club's offer to Bayern's Arjen Robben: I can confirm that we haven't made a formal offer, but I have asked him if he wants to join.
On discussions with former Dutch star Wesley Sneijder about their experience in



PSV Eindhoven's head coach Mark van Bommel.

Qatar's league: Yes of course, I spoke with Sneijder and Nigel de Young and saw them for a couple of times this week. It was nice to speak with a lot of players that I played with and they are really happy to be here to be part in the competition league also with Xavi and they want to stay. That means that you want to be here.

On Xavi Hernandez, as he will finish his career as a player this season and going to be a coach: As a player I loved to play with him. I played one year with Xavi - unfortunately he had an injury in the second half of

the season. But if you talk about Xavi, everybody is talking very well about his football qualities and his leadership. It is difficult to predict how he will be as a coach but if you see his way of playing on the middle of the pitch and his leadership I it is possible that he will be a very good coach.

On the ongoing preparations for the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar: I think it will be a spectacular event as we can see the pitches and the stadiums. If the professionalism we have seen at Aspire Zone is anything to go by, I am expecting big things in 2022."

QSL CUP

Al Kharaitiyat enter last 8

By Sports Reporters
Doha

Al Kharaitiyat beat Umm Salal 2-0 to enter the QSL Cup quarter-finals. In the fifth round match played at the Al Arabi Stadium yesterday, Umm Salal needed only a draw, while for Kharaitiyat it was a must-win situation. A win ensured Kharaitiyat progressed to the quarters as the fourth team from Group A along with Al Gharafa, Al Duhail and Qatar SC.

Meanwhile, Al Arabi played out a 1-1 draw with Al Gharafa. Al Arabi were out of contention for qualification. The match between Qatar SC and Al Duhail will be played today, along with the three other Group B games. First-half goals from Majed Salmeen and Abdulaziz al-Ansari powered Kharaitiyat to victory against Salal. Kharaitiyat opened the scoring at the half hour mark when Salmeen fired home off an indirect corner kick.

After picking up a loose ball, Salmeen tapped it with a pacy shot that went through the hands of Umm Salal goalkeeper Basel Zaidan. Three minutes from the first-half whistle, Al Kharaitiyat doubled their lead with a bit of luck favouring them. A loopy cross from an Umm Salal player landed at the feet of Abdulaziz, who volleyed home in style, sending the ball crashing into the net.

In another match, a second-half strike by Wesley Sneijder helped Al Gharafa record a 1-1 draw against Al Arabi. Hosts Arabi grabbed the lead in the 23rd minute. Fahad Khalfan spotted Diego Jardel unmarked close to the Al Gharafa box and slipped in a neat cross.

The Brazilian midfielder tapped the ball and charged into the Al Gharafa box even as keeper

Qasim Burhan stepped out of his position. Jardel easily hoodwinked Burhan and flicked the ball into the net. In the second half, Al Gharafa upped the ante and attacked the Al Arabi goalmouth repeatedly.

In the 74th minute, Dutch international and Al Gharafa skipper Wesley Sneijder exhibited glimpses of his brilliance when he curled in a superb free-kick to score the equaliser.

The ball dipped on before entering the net, but unfortunately Al Arabi keeper Mahmoud Ibrahim hit the goalpost and hurt himself. The game was stopped for a while before play resumed as Mahmoud received treatment.



Al Kharaitiyat's Abdulaziz al-Ansari is ecstatic after scoring against Umm Salal at the QSL Cup.

FOCUS

Smith leaves Bangladesh T20 meet with injury

AFP
Dhaka

Former Australian cricket captain Steve Smith will drop out of the Bangladesh Premier League Twenty20 tournament due to an elbow injury after playing just two matches, his franchise Comilla Victorians said yesterday.

"Smith has suffered an elbow injury. We are not sure how he picked it up, but the last two days he could not bat in training due to the problem," Victorians' head coach Mohammad Salahuddin told AFP.

"He had an MRI test here but the result was not very clear. He sent the report to Australian physicians who advised him to return home immediately," he said. Smith, who was leading Comilla in the tournament, scored just 13 runs in his two matches, including a duck in the last match, in which his team was



Former Australian cricket captain Steve Smith.

dismissed for a lowly 63 runs.

Salahuddin said he expected Smith to return to the league once he had recovered from the injury. He was scheduled to leave Dhaka at 10pm local time (16:00pm GMT).

Comilla signed Smith initially as a back-up to Pakistan's Shoaib Malik but later added him to the squad following clearance from the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

The BCB had initially blocked

his participation after other franchises raised objections as Smith was not included in the initial players' draft list for the tournament. Smith is currently serving a one-year ban from international cricket and Australia's domestic Sheffield Shield and Big Bash leagues over a ball-tampering scandal last year.

His former deputy David Warner, who is serving a similar ban for his role in the scandal, is also playing in the BPL, captain-

ing the Sylhet Sixers franchise.

South African big hitter AB de Villiers, West Indies' Chris Gayle and England's Alex Hales are among the other international stars set to play in Bangladesh's lucrative Twenty20 league.

The BPL was dogged by match-fixing scandals and delayed pay for some foreign players after it started in 2011.

After a one-year suspension in 2015 it has since been staged without serious controversy.

BANCROFT KEEN TO RESUME OPENING WITH WARNER

Cameron Bancroft insists he holds no grudges against David Warner and is keen to resume their opening partnership for Australia that was derailed by the ball-tampering scandal.

The 26-year-old Bancroft, who has completed his nine-month ban for the cheating, confirmed in an explosive television interview last month it was Warner who asked him to alter the ball.



Australian batsman Cameron Bancroft

Warner and Steve Smith still have three months of their suspensions left to run over the incident last March in South Africa that rocked the game.

Despite some pundits suggesting their relationship was now untenable, Bancroft said he held no ill feeling and was in touch with both Warner and Smith. "Absolutely," he told reporters when asked if he would want to play with Warner again. "We're good people, very

honest and passionate people. Dave, like Steve, all of us, we've all gone through our challenges, haven't we?"

Bancroft, who has admitted he nearly walked away from the game to become a yoga teacher in the wake of the vitriol that met the tampering scandal, added that "we've all been there for each other".

"And I look forward to a day like that where I can go out and play cricket with Dave again.

He's a quality cricketer and someone who's achieved so much in that cricket team.

"As a player like myself, you strive to be around players like that. For my own learning as a cricketer, I'd love for that to happen."

Bancroft is now back playing with the Perth Scorchers in the Big Bash League, stroking a match-winning half century on Wednesday evening.

He is due for a county cricket stint with Durham later this year, and has an eye on the Ashes tour of England, with Australia's opening batsmen struggling in the absence of himself and Warner.

"I just love playing cricket, regardless of the Ashes, it was something I was really keen to do," he said of the Durham move.

"I've missed a chunk of domestic cricket and come the end of the cricket season I'll just be keen to get over there and continue to improve and enjoy this great game."

PREVIEW

No complacency, says SA's stand-in skipper Elgar

'They come out with some fire. When conditions suit them, potentially they are up there'

AFP
Johannesburg

Stand-in South African captain Dean Elgar said yesterday he had given a "blunt message" to his players ahead of the third and final Test against Pakistan, starting at the Wanderers Stadium today.

"I spoke to the team yesterday and I told them that any complacency needs to be ironed out," said Elgar, who is standing in for the suspended Faf du Plessis. Elgar said South Africa were determined to complete a 3-0 clean sweep against the tourists.

There is a personal reason for Elgar to get a win as captain. His only previous international captaincy was in the first Test against England at Lord's in 2017 when Du Plessis flew home to be at the birth of his first child. South Africa were beaten in that match and Elgar admitted that he found the experience "chaotic".

"It was the start of a very big series with all the hype and media commitments, so I wasn't really able to enjoy it," he said. "This time we've got the series in the bag and although it's still a massive goal to win 3-0 there is a little less stress. I'm hoping to enjoy this experience."

Elgar said South Africa had been in position to finish off opponents in the final Tests of previous series, notably against India last year, but had let the opportunities slip. South Africa will move up to second place on the International Cricket Council Test rankings, which Elgar said he regarded as "a massive opportunity".

Elgar said he was "pretty sure" opening batting partner Aiden Markram would play after undergoing a fitness test on Thursday. He also hinted that South Africa would again opt to play four fast bowlers on a pitch which has usually favoured them. "It looks a good wicket and hopefully it will have pace and bounce."



South African batsman Dean Elgar (left) celebrates after South Africa defeated Pakistan on the fourth day of the second Test at Newlands Cricket Stadium in Cape Town on January 6, 2019. (AFP)

PAKISTAN'S 'FIERY' FAST-BOWLERS

If South Africa went the all-seam route, Elgar said he would be aware of the problem of keeping up with the required over rate, following Du Plessis's ban for a second over-rate offence in 12 months. "I will have to bowl a few overs," he said of his left-arm spin, "and (off-spinner) Aiden (Markram) may have to bowl a few overs too."

As an opening batsman, Elgar said he had been "mightily impressed" with Pakistan's fast

bowlers. "They come out with some fire. When conditions suit them, potentially they are up there with the best."

Pakistan batsman Azhar Ali said that although his team were disappointed to have lost the series, they hoped to bring their "A game" to the Wanderers.

"Every Test match you play outside (the UAE) is important for us. Hopefully we can win this Test match and it will be very good for us, especially with the one-dayers coming up."

Pakistan play a series of five

one-day internationals after the Tests. "Any tour of South Africa you learn a lot," said Azhar. "It is always tough. We tried to plan for it and practise for it but unfortunately it did not go to plan. But there are still some things we think we have achieved. A few of the batsmen got stuck in and showed they can play on these wickets."

Despite being Pakistan's most experienced batsman, Azhar has had a poor series, with only 44 runs in four innings. "Coming into this series I had

good confidence and the way I was playing in nets and in the side (warm-up) game I felt very good," he said.

"Unfortunately I didn't perform but I still have one game to play and hopefully I can convert that good touch in the middle."

Azhar said the Wanderers pitch looked better for batting than those for the first two Tests. "It looks a better track. Yes, it has grass but in terms of cracks, I think they will widen much later than in the first two Test matches."

ONE-DAYERS

Mitchell sidelined with stomach issue, Turner in as cover

Reuters
Melbourne

Australia's Mitchell Marsh doesn't have the stomach for the first one-day international against India after coach Justin Langer told reporters yesterday that the all-rounder had been struck down with a bout of gastritis.

With Marsh forced to sit out the opener of a three-match series, Australia called uncapped batsman Ashton Turner into the squad as cover for tomorrow's Sydney Cricket Ground contest.

"He's got gastritis so he's spent two days in hospital," Langer told a news conference.

"We'll just have to wait and see how he recovers but he certainly won't play this first one."

Turner has deputised for Marsh as captain of Western Australia while the all-rounder was on international duty and Langer said the 25-year-old was a "great athlete".

"He's in great form, he finishes off the innings well," said Langer, a former Western Australia coach.

"He's a lead athlete in the field and he's also a captain. He's a good thinker of the game like most great finishers and a good leader, a really good per-

son around the group. I'm very excited to see him coming in."

Marsh and his batsman brother Shaun were dropped from the test side for upcoming matches against Sri Lanka on Wednesday after Australia lost a home series to India for the first time when Virat Kohli's men prevailed 2-1.

Langer, a close friend of their father Geoff "Swampy" Marsh, said it had been a tough decision to make. "That's what leadership's about, you've got to make tough calls," he added.

"I've known them since they were kids, Geoff Marsh is one of my best friends and coached with me in Western Australia.

"But at the end of the day, the boys know, and Swampy knows, that it's a tough business and if you are not performing, you don't get picked." Langer also tersely dismissed the notion that selectors were excluding batsman Glenn Maxwell from the test squad for reasons other than his form out in the middle.

"Glenn is crystal clear from me and the selectors on what he needs to do to get back in the test team," he said.

"There have been some reports about personality: it is literally false. It's not true. He's crystal clear what he has to do. All the conjecture about it, that's all part of the noise."

SPOTLIGHT

Shetty, Bhogle back showcause notices to Pandya, Rahul

IANS
New Delhi

Former BCCI general manager of cricket administration Ratnakar Shetty and noted commentator Harsha Bhogle have backed the showcause notices issued to cricketers Hardik Pandya and Lokesh Rahul for their allegedly indecent and sexist remarks during a television show hosted by Bollywood filmmaker Karan Johar.

"It is time the BCCI decides to take corrective steps for cricketers who talk rubbish on public platforms. Hardik Pandya was a disgrace to the cricket community the way he spoke on Koffee with Karan show. He has insulted the women and also made a racist remark," Shetty wrote on Twitter.

Bhogle, however appeared less harsh on the duo but urged the BCCI to "sensitise" the youngsters.

"It is all very well to issue showcause notices now to KL Rahul and Hardik Pandya. But I do wish the BCCI spends time in sensitising these young players to life beyond the dressing room; to getting them outside the bubble that is inevitable given the adulation they get," he said.

Earlier, both Pandya and Rahul were issued showcause notices by the Committee of Administrators (CoA) and were given 24 hours to reply.

Pandya had however, issued an apology for his alleged "sexist" comments made during the show. Pandya said he got "carried away by the nature" of the show, where he boasted about hooking up with multiple women and how he was open with his parents about his adventures.

"After reflecting on my comments on Koffee with Karan, I would like to apologise to everyone concerned who I may have hurt in any way," Pandya wrote on Twitter.

"Honestly, I got a bit carried away with the nature of the show. In no way did I mean to disrespect or hurt anyone's sentiments. Respect," he added.

Pandya is currently with the Indian team in Australia where they recently registered a historic 2-1 Test series win, the first in India's crickering history Down Under.

Proteas select uncapped Van der Dussen for Pakistan ODIs

South Africa have named uncapped batsman Rassie van der Dussen in their 14-man squad for the first two contests of the five-match home one-day international series against Pakistan as they explore options ahead of the World Cup later this year. The 29-year-old Van der Dussen was the highest scorer in the recent Mzansi Super League domestic Twenty20 competition, averaging almost 60 in 12 matches at a strike-rate of close to 140.

Returning to the squad are seamer Dane Paterson and stalwart batsman Hashim Amla, who missed the away series win in Australia in November through injury. Batsman JP Duminy and fast bowler Lungi Ngidi have not been considered because of injury.

"We need to look at all the options available to us as we get closer to selecting our final squad for this year's World Cup and Rassie and Dane are two players who have been knocking strongly on the

door in all formats," Cricket South Africa selection convener Linda Zondi said in a statement yesterday. "Those players who went to Australia and have not been selected for the first two matches -- Farhaan Behardien, Aiden Markram and Chris Morris -- are by no means out of the picture, and they may well get further opportunities in the second half of the series."

The first ODI will be played in Port Elizabeth on Jan. 19, with the second in

Durban three days later. The 50-over World Cup is being held in England and Wales from May 30-July 14.

SQUAD:

Faf du Plessis (captain), Hashim Amla, Quinton de Kock, Reeza Hendricks, Imran Tahir, Heinrich Klaasen, David Miller, Dane Paterson, Andile Phehlukwayo, Dwaane Pretorius, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi, Dale Steyn, Rassie van der Dussen.

NBA

Antetokounmpo leads Bucks over Rockets

'He just does everything. He has a huge impact on winning'

AFP
Los Angeles

Milwaukee's NBA Most Valuable Player contender Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 27 points to lead the Bucks to a hard-fought 116-109 victory Wednesday over reigning MVP James Harden and the Houston Rockets.

Antetokounmpo added 21 rebounds and was a physical presence on both ends of the floor as the Bucks battled back from a 60-54 halftime deficit to end the Rockets' 10-game home winning streak.

"He just does everything," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said of the imposing Antetokounmpo, who drained 11 of his 14 free-throw attempts. "He has a huge impact on winning."

RESULTS

Dallas	104-94	Phoenix
Brooklyn	116-100	Atlanta
Portland	124-112	Chicago
Utah	106-93	Orlando
Milwaukee	116-109	Houston
Memphis	96-86	San Antonio
New Orleans	140-124	Cleveland
Boston	135-108	Indiana
Washington	123-106	Philadelphia
Lakers	113-100	Detroit

The Bucks led by as many as 15 in the fourth quarter, but Harden and the Rockets had whittled that lead to three with less than two minutes remaining.

Antetokounmpo, after missing a free throw with 1:39 to play, came out of a timeout and made the second to keep the Bucks ahead by four.

After Harden turned the ball over, then regained it with a steal only to miss a three-pointer, Antetokounmpo made sure the next Bucks possession produced some points as he rose to tap in a miss by Khrist Middleton.

Harden, who finished with 42 points and 11 rebounds, missed another three-pointer and the Bucks held on to take their record to 29-11 - percentage points ahead of the 31-12 Toronto Raptors for best record in the league. Malcolm Brogdon added 24 points, connecting on nine of 12 from the field. All of those baskets came from the paint, where the Bucks out-scored the Rockets 70-24.

In Boston, the Celtics led by as many as 31 points in a wire-to-wire 135-108 romp over the Indiana Pacers. The Celtics notched their fourth straight victory - all coming at home before they set off on a road trip that starts in Miami on Thursday.

Starting forward Marcus Morris and reserve Jaylen Brown both scored 22 points for the Celtics and Jayson Tatum added 20.

They jumped on a Pacers team playing their fourth game in six nights, opening the game on an 18-8 scoring run.

In Washington, the Wizards made the most of a return home with a convincing 123-106 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers



Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo shoots the ball as Houston Rockets forward PJ Tucker (17) defends during the third quarter of their NBA game at Toyota Center. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

- a day after the Sixers dominated the Wizards 132-115 in Philly. The Sixers had won four in a row, but they have now lost nine straight in the nation's capital, a skid dating back to November 2013.

"We knew what Washington was going to come out with," said 76ers coach Brett Brown, who said his team's 24 turnovers was too much to overcome. "I give Washington credit with their energy, but we weren't sharp tonight," Brown said. Bradley Beal's 34 points included 14 straight for the Wizards in the fourth quarter. Otto Porter Jr. scored 23 and Trevor Ariza added 17 for Washington, with Joel Embiid leading the 76ers with 35 points and 14 rebounds.

NETS RALLY

The Brooklyn Nets overcame a 19-point first-half deficit to beat the Atlanta Hawks 116-100 in New York. D'Angelo Russell led the Nets with 23 points. DeMarre Carroll added 17 off the bench and starting guard Joe Harris and reserve Spencer Dinwiddie added 16 apiece for Brooklyn, who edged ahead of Miami for the sixth spot in the East.

Brooklyn opened the fourth quarter on a 14-3 scoring run on the way to their 13th victory in 16 games - continuing their turnaround from an eight-game losing streak that had left them at 8-18 in early December.

The New Orleans Pelicans also climbed out of an early hole erasing a 16-point first-

half deficit to defeat the Cleveland Cavaliers 140-124. Anthony Davis scored 38 points and pulled down 13 rebounds for the Pelicans, who won a third straight game for the first time since November.

"The game didn't start exactly how we wanted it to," said Pelicans coach Alvin Gentry, noting Cleveland's red-hot start from three-point range that saw the Cavs make all eight of their first-quarter three-point attempts.

"I thought in the second half offensively we moved the basketball and did a great job. Obviously if you have back-to-back 40-point quarters the offense is working pretty well."

NFL

Browns promote Kitchens to head coach

Reuters
New York

The Cleveland Browns are promoting offensive coordinator **Freddie Kitchens** to head coach, according to multiple reports. An official announcement was expected to come Wednesday.

Kitchens, 44, becomes the 17th full-time head coach in franchise history. He replaces Hue Jackson, who was fired in October after compiling a 3-36-1 record.

After parting ways with Jackson, the Browns promoted Kitchens from running backs coach to offensive co-ordinator and named defensive coordinator Gregg Williams as interim head coach. Williams has been relieved of his duties and is no longer with the team.

Williams wrote a message to Browns fans and the people of Cleveland, which was posted Wednesday by NFL Network, thanking them for their support.

"It has been an honour to coach this team and we loved living in this community with the finest, most passionate fans in the world," Williams said. "I am proud that we were able to help get the Browns back to the winning tradition the fans deserve. I am humbled to have worked for such a storied franchise and will always love the city of Cleveland, this city deserves a winner!"

His departure is one of several from the Browns' previous coaching staff. Per multiple reports, Cleveland released special-teams co-ordinator Amos Jones, position coaches Ken Zampese (QBs), Bob Wylie (OL), Blake Williams (LBs) and Greg Seamon (TEs), and several other coaches including special-teams assistant Josh Cribbs, a former Browns Pro Bowler. The Browns will also have a different organizational structure, according to multiple reports. Kitchens will report to general manager John Dorsey rather than owner Jimmy Haslam, a departure from the structure for previous coaches.

The team's confidence in Kitchens was boosted by the play of rookie quarterback Baker Mayfield under his watch. In eight games with Kitchens as OC, Mayfield threw for 2,254 yards, 19 touchdowns and eight interceptions and was sacked just five times.

A quarterback at Alabama from 1993-97, Kitchens coached in the college ranks from 1999-2005 as an assistant at Glenville State, LSU, North Texas and Mississippi State. He broke into the NFL as tight ends coach with the Dallas Cowboys in 2006, and held the same role with the Arizona Cardinals from 2007-12. He served as Arizona's quarterbacks coach from 2013-16 and as the Cardinals' running backs coach in 2017.

EX-PACKER MCCARTHY WON'T COACH IN 2019

After being passed over for head-coaching jobs by the Cleveland Browns and New York Jets, former Green Bay Packers head coach Mike McCarthy told NFL Network he will sit out the 2019 season. McCarthy will prepare and be ready for 2020, he told the network, and spend the interim time with his wife and five kids in Green Bay.

Per multiple reports Wednesday, the Browns are promoting interim offensive coordinator Freddie Kitchens to head coach, while the Jets are hiring former Miami Dolphins head coach Adam Gase. McCarthy was believed to be a top candidate with the Arizona Cardinals, but he reportedly did not have interest in the job.

McCarthy, 55, was fired after Week 13 as the Packers dropped to 4-7-1 amid their second consecutive losing season, and just the third of McCarthy's 13-year tenure. Overall, McCarthy went 125-77-2 in Green Bay, including eight seasons with 10-plus wins and a Super Bowl championship following the 2010 season.

Before joining the Packers, McCarthy spent six years as an offensive coordinator (one with the San Francisco 49ers, five with the New Orleans Saints), seven years as an assistant on various NFL staffs and six years on college staffs. He hasn't missed a year of coaching since becoming a graduate assistant at Fort Hays State in 1987.

NHL

Senators snap skid with OT win over Ducks

Reuters
Anaheim

In a battle of teams looking to get back on track, Colin White scored 1:34 into overtime as the visiting Ottawa Senators ended their eight-game losing streak Wednesday with a 2-1 victory over the Anaheim Ducks.

Senators right winger Mark Stone attacked the Ducks goal and slipped a pass back to White for the game-winner. It was the 11th goal of the season for White. Down 1-0 less than nine minutes into the game, the Senators had few scoring chances until they started to make an offensive push in the third period. Ottawa finally tied the score 1-1 at 9:23 of the third period. Bobby Ryan cleaned up a loose puck out in front of the Ducks' goal and slid a shot past goaltender John Gibson. It was the eighth of the season for Ryan.

Former Senator Jakob Silfverberg scored the lone goal for the Ducks, who saw their losing streak extend to a franchise-worst nine games (0-6-3). The Ducks have not won since Dec. 17, when they picked up a 4-2 victory at Pittsburgh. Their past five consecutive defeats have all come at home.

Despite the loss, Gibson continued to do the heavy lifting for his team, making 28 saves. He entered as one of the top goalies in the NHL with a .923 save percentage. Silfverberg's 11th goal of the season came just 8:52 into the first period. Defenseman Brandon Montour carried the puck into the Senators' zone and broke down the defense before he passed back to Silfverberg at the top of the right circle. Silfverberg's blast beat Senators goaltender Anders Nilsson to the glove side.

RESULTS

Nashville	4-3	Chicago
Calgary	5-3	Colorado
Ottawa	2-1	Anaheim
Nashville	4-3	Chicago
Calgary	5-3	Colorado
Ottawa	2-1	Anaheim

Ducks center Ryan Getzlaf saw his career-worst streak without a point reach eight games. He has nine goals and 20 assists this season. Nilsson was playing in his third game for the Senators and making his second start. The 28-year-old Swede, who was acquired from the Vancouver Canucks on January 2, made 32 saves in his first victory with his new team.

The Senators were without center Matt Duchene, who remained in Ottawa for the birth of his first child and is not expected to play in any of the team's three games in California this week.

Duchene ranks second on the Senators with 18 goals and 42 points. The Ducks welcomed back center Rickard Rakell from an ankle injury. Rakell, who was out for 13 games, took two shots on goal in 19:25.

FORSBERG SCORES IN OT TO LEAD SENATORS PAST BLACKHAWKS

Filip Forsberg scored twice, including the game winner one minute into overtime, to lead the visiting Nashville Predators past the Chicago Blackhawks 4-3 on Wednesday night. Pekka Rinne stopped 28 shots, Viktor Arvidsson scored his fifth goal in six games and Ryan Johansen and Mattias Ekholm had two assists for Nashville, which improved to

3-0-1 on its season-high, six-game road trip. Recently removed from ending a 10-game road losing streak, the Central Division-leading Predators now have won four of their past five games away from Bridgestone Arena and five of six overall.

Artem Anisimov forced overtime for the Blackhawks with 2:21 left in regulation, scoring from the slot on a pass from Patrick Kane. Playing in his second game since returning from a 17-game absence due to an upper-body injury, Forsberg ended the night with his overtime goal, assisted by Ekholm and Calle Jarnkrok, not long thereafter.

The Predators opened the scoring at 6:49 of the first period, as Colton Sissons buried a one-timer in the slot past Chicago goaltender Collin Delia. Blackhawks defenseman Erik Gustafsson committed a costly turnover behind the net to lead to the goal.

Sissons gathered a no-look, backhanded feed from Kevin Fiala for his career-high-tying ninth goal. Chicago evened the score on Alex DeBrincat's 21st goal of the season, a power-play tally, at the 17:51 mark of the first period, but Nashville reclaimed the lead just eight seconds later. Arvidsson took a break-out pass from PK Subban, cut inside to create a breakaway chance and converted.

Forsberg made it 3-1 Nashville on a power-play goal with 3:34 left in the second period. Chicago drew to within one goal again at the 19:40 mark, however, when Jonathan Toews wristed a shorthanded goal past Rinne on a backhanded feed from Marcus Kruger.

The Blackhawks went on the power play at 6:42 of the third period but were unable to score the equaliser. Chicago was 1 for 2 with the man advantage, while the Predators were 1 for 4.



Ottawa Senators players celebrate their overtime victory over Anaheim Ducks at the Honda Center in Anaheim, California. (Getty Images/AFP)

FOCUS

Kvitova blasts past Kerber and into Sydney semis

FP
Sydney

Petra Kvitova sent defending champion Angelique Kerber packing from the rain-affected Sydney International yesterday to book a semi-final spot and get an edge over her rival heading into the Australian Open next week.

It was always going to be a tight match with the pair tied 6-6 in 12 previous meetings. Play was suspended early in the first set due to rain. They returned several hours later but the drizzle soon began falling again and it was back to the locker room for the two tournament drawcards.

They eventually resumed at 10:30pm and Czech fifth seed Kvitova, who won the title in 2015, took charge, quickly racing through the first set to put the German world number two on the back foot. Kvitova kept the pressure on and got a crucial break in game four of the second set and there was no way back for Kerber who meekly surrendered 6-4, 6-1.

"The weather has not been great and it's not easy to wait in the locker room, but I was glad I could come back out and play so well," Kvitova said after reaching the semi-finals in

Sydney for a fourth time.

Her reward is a clash with Belarusian qualifier Aliaksandra Sasnovich, who beat Switzerland's Tímea Bacsinszky – on the comeback trail after a 14-month winless spell – 6-3, 6-3.

Australia's Ashleigh Barty followed up her giant-killing wins over world number one Simona Halep and former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko by easily accounting for 10th seeded Belgian Elise Mertens 6-3, 6-3. The 22-year-old is now on a six-match win streak, dating back to her career's biggest title at the WTA Elite Trophy in Zhuhai.

"Nice and solid today, I was pretty happy at the way I was able to come out and play," said Barty, ranked 15 in the world.

She will play seventh seed Kiki Bertens who blasted past Yulia Putintseva 6-2, 6-2 for a place in the final.

SEPPi DERAILS TSITSIPAS

In the men's draw, veteran Andreas Seppi derailed top seed Stefanos Tsitsipas' title hopes. Seppi, 14 years older than his 20-year-old Greek opponent, has only won three ATP titles in his career, but called on all his experience as he battled back for a gutsy 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 win.

"For some reason I always play my

best tennis in Australia, so I really enjoy being here," said Seppi, who broke immediately in the second set after losing the first.

"It was very important to start well in the second set. Good to have an early break so I could play a bit more aggressive and it worked out in the end."

Australia has been a home away from home for the Italian in recent years.

In a trio of round-of-16 appearances at the Australian Open, he pulled off upsets against Marin Cilic in 2013, Roger Federer in 2015 and Nick Kyrgios in 2017. Defeat was a blow for world No.15 Tsitsipas' preparations for the opening Grand Slam of the year in Melbourne next week.

He was one of the sport's most improved players last year, climbing from 91 after reaching finals in Barcelona and Toronto, losing both to Rafael Nadal, and was angling for the perfect start ahead of the Australian Open.

Seppi will now play third seeded Argentine Diego Schwartzman, who needed to fight hard to beat Japanese qualifier Yoshihito Nishioka 6-1, 3-6, 7-6 (7/1).

In other quarter-final action, fifth seeded teenager Alex De Minaur continued his strong start to the season with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 victory over fellow Australian Jordan Thompson.



Petra Kvitova of the Czech Republic hits a return against Angelique Kerber of Germany during their singles quarter-final match at the Sydney International tennis tournament in Sydney yesterday. (AFP)

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Federer to launch defence against unseeded Istomin

Djokovic faces qualifier, Serena to meet unseeded German Maria in first round

Reuters
Melbourne

Double defending champion Roger Federer will start his bid for a hat-trick of Australian Open titles next week against unseeded Uzbek Denis Istomin, who caused a huge upset when he defeated Novak Djokovic in the second round two years ago.

The draw for the first Grand Slam of the season was made yesterday and the top seeds could face some early tests of their title credentials when play gets underway on Monday.

The six-times Australian Open champion Federer, who beat Marin Cilic in last year's final, could meet the Croat in the quarter-finals, should the Swiss come through a potentially tricky fourth round against Greek prospect Stefanos Tsitsipas.

The 37-year-old, seeded third, is bidding to extend his all-time leading men's Grand Slam record to 21 title and would capture a 100th ATP tournament win in the process.

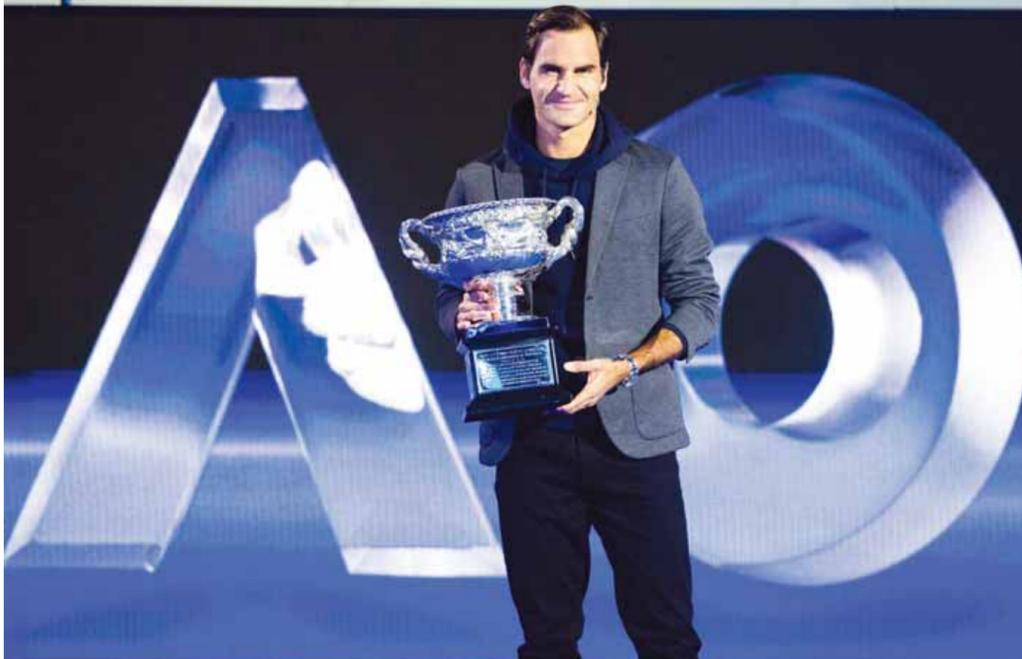
"I always have tried to remind myself that this is a dream," Federer said of his longevity at the draw ceremony held at Margaret Court Arena, where he discovered the world number 99 would be his opening opponent. "I'm surprised that I'm still at this level, that I'm still in the top 10."

Men's top seed Djokovic, who was defending his title when he lost to Istomin, will first meet a qualifier in his bid for a record seventh Melbourne title and third Grand Slam crown in succession following wins at Wimbledon and the US Open.

Serb Djokovic could then play a rematch of his 2008 final triumph over Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga in the second round, with a possible quarter-final against Kei Nishikori to follow. Second seed Rafa Nadal, under an injury cloud after pulling out of the Brisbane International, will open against unseeded local James Duckworth.

Last year's semi-finalist Kyle Edmund looms as a possible fourth round match-up for the Spaniard, who could then face big-serving Kevin Anderson in the quarter-finals. The 2009 champion Nadal, who retired hurt in the quarter-finals against Cilic last year, could meet old rival Federer in the last four should his body hold up.

Meanwhile Djokovic gave



Roger Federer of Switzerland and Caroline Wozniacki (below) of Denmark pose with the men's singles and women's singles trophies during the draw ceremony for the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

Andy Murray a reality check in the lead, dominating the Briton 6-1 4-1 in a practice match at Melbourne Park yesterday.

Murray has struggled to regain form since undergoing hip surgery last January, and was quickly dismantled by the six-times Australian Open champion at Margaret Court Arena before the players called time on their match after less than an hour.

WOZNIACKI'S 'HAPPY SLAM'

In the women's tournament, Serena Williams's bid for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title and eighth at Melbourne Park will kick off against a German world number 71 Tatjana Maria. The American great, beaten by Naomi Osaka in the 2018 US Open final after a fiery tirade against the chair umpire, faces a tough run to the quarter-finals, with top seed and last year's finalist Simona Halep a possible fourth round encounter.

Halep, however, may be reluctant to look beyond the first round, having drawn her US Open nemesis Kaia Kanepi.

Unseeded Estonian Kanepi knocked Halep out of the first

round at Flushing Meadows last year, making the Romanian the first top seed to lose at that tournament's earliest stage.

Venus Williams, defeated by younger sister Serena in the 2017 Melbourne final, also looms as a possible third round opponent for Halep. Fourth seed Osaka faces Poland's Magda Linette first up and may need to battle past twice champion Victoria Azarenka in the third round.

Defending champion Wozniacki, who broke through for her maiden Grand Slam title with victory over Halep in last year's final, is in line to face former winner Maria Sharapova in a mouth-watering third round showdown. "I can't believe it's been a year already," Dame Wozniacki said at the draw ceremony. "To finally get that (title) here was so special, it's the happy slam."

Second seed and 2016 champion Angelique Kerber, bidding for a fourth Grand Slam title, will open against Slovenian Polona Hercog, with a possible quarter-final against 2017 US Open winner Sloane Stephens in the second week.



SPOTLIGHT

Kohlschreiber flogs feeble Fognini in Auckland quarters

AFP
Wellington

Evergreen Philipp Kohlschreiber rolled back the years to storm into the Auckland Classic semi-finals yesterday with a straight-sets demolition of second seed Fabio Fognini. The 35-year-old German tore apart the lacklustre Italian 6-3, 6-1 to remain in the reckoning at a tournament where he claimed the title way in back in 2008.

Currently ranked 34th in the world, Kohlschreiber has not dropped a set on his way to a final four showdown with American Tennyson Sandgren, who beat Argentina's Leonardo Mayer 6-3, 7-6 (7/5).

The other semi-final pits Briton Cameron Norrie – a victor over American Tyler Fritz – against Jan-Lennard Struff of Germany. Kohlschreiber, unseeded this year, was a class above world number 13 Fognini, who appeared unfocused and more interested in boarding a plane to next week's Australian Open in Melbourne.

Despite his advancing years, the veteran is shaping as a strong contender in a field weakened by withdrawals and upset results that have sent all the seeds heading for the exits.

Kohlschreiber comfortably beat Sandgren in straight sets in their only previous meeting in Monte Carlo last year.

"I'm still improving my game even at 35-years old... I

have to be ready for the young ones and I'll try to continue to play for a few years yet," he said. Kohlschreiber raced to an early break in the first set then held on as Fognini stretched the German's next service game out for 10 minutes trying to respond.

But the German had all the answers and Fognini's resistance crumbled as the set wore on, with the Italian committing 16 unforced errors and four double faults.

The second set followed a similar pattern and the only time Fognini appeared animated was when he received a code violation for petulantly hitting a ball into the crowd.

There was no lack of application from either player in Struff's epic 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (6/8), 7-6 (9/7) win over Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta, which stretched for three hours in humid conditions.

"I was just grinding and hanging in there," Struff said, paying tribute to his opponent's fighting qualities.

He has never previously met his semi-final opponent Norrie, who was raised in New Zealand but switched allegiances to Britain when he was 16. Norrie admitted he was apprehensive ahead of his 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 win over Fritz.

"Honestly, I was expecting to do shocking here," he said, "I've never played well in Auckland at this tournament, so it's a big surprise to me but it means so much."

Cilic cruises at Kooyong

Last year's Australian Open finalist Marin Cilic rounded off his preparations for this year's edition in style yesterday, winning his second match in as many days at the Kooyong Classic. With the first Grand Slam of the season starting on Monday, every opportunity is important for the Croatian, who went down in a battle to Roger Federer in the Melbourne Park decider in 2018.

The world number seven beat Spain's Fernando Verdasco 6-4, 6-4, backing up his three-set victory a day before over world No. 6 Kevin Anderson.

Earlier, American Jack Sock lost to fast-rising Canadian teenager Denis Shapovalov 6-2, 3-6, 10-7 after a final set played as a 10-point tiebreak – the format which will be used at the Australian Open from Monday.

Under the rules, the first player to win at least 10 points by a two-point margin takes the match.

Ahead of the Australian Open last year, Sock was at a career-high eighth in the world rankings, but after a horror season he has plunged outside the top 100 and is desperate to turn it around.

His form slump has been dramatic. He played 31 singles matches in 2018, winning a mere nine.

"I had some pretty low moments last year, it was horrendous," said Sock. "I did a lot of regrouping in the off-season, talking to family, team members, coaches."

"I'm trying to take a positive outlook. I know the level that I can play the game, where my game should be."

With the Australian Open just days away, he is grateful to be out of the spotlight to focus on himself.

"It's nice to be able to fly under the radar and do my own thing."

Shapovalov, 19, made up for lost time after losing in the first round at Auckland this week and then crossing the Tasman to squeeze into the Kooyong draw as a late entry.

"It's great to be here and get another match, fire a few balls," the world No.27 said. "It's another chance to get the match feel. You have some of the pressure, there's a crowd watching. It's a chance to get a little bit more ready for the Slam."

HANDBALL WORLDS

Asian champs Qatar aim to make a mark on world stage

In the 2017 edition in France, Qatar finished eighth after losing in the quarter-finals



Qatar players, Qatar Handball Federation president Ahmed al-Shaabi, team coach Valero Rivera and other officials celebrate with the trophy after winning the Asian Handball Championship in Suwon, South Korea, in January last year.

IHF
Copenhagen

Valero Rivera is hoping to celebrate the start of his sixth year as coach of the Qatar national team with a win against Angola in the handball World Championship beginning today in Germany and Denmark. He was hired to take the reins of the team in 2013 after having coached Spain to the world title that year. He then coached Qatar to the 2015 World Championship in Doha where the hosts finished runners-up to France. It was the first time an Asian team had reached the final of the event. In the 2017 edition in France, Qatar finished eighth after they lost their quarter-final to eventual bronze medallists Slovenia.

Since taking over back in 2013, Rivera has made Qatar dominant on the continental stage, winning the Asian Championship in all three editions (2014, 2016

and 2018) as well as the Asian Games in August in Indonesia. The last two continental competitions - Indonesia in August and Korea in January - saw Qatar beat Bahrain in both events, although Indonesia saw the Bahrain side take the Qataris to additional time. "We fought hard to win," said key player, left back Rafael Capote, who was born in Cuba, but became a naturalised Qatar. He was joined in the squad by left back Frankis Carol Marzo, who plays in the EHF Champions League with Sporting CP in Portugal, and who was also naturalised from Cuba. Long-time goalkeeper Danijel Saric, who has played internationally for Serbia and Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, is set to play in Germany/Denmark at the age of 41-years-old. In addition to the naturalised players, Qatar have been working hard to develop home-grown talent and recent squads have shown the long-term project from Rivera resulting in a mix of home-grown

and naturalised players with names including Firas Chaieb, Rasheed Yusuff, Mahmoud Hassaballa, Ahmad Madadi, Kamal Aldin Mallash, Youssef Ali, Moustafa Heiba and Anis Zouaoui included. To qualify for Germany/Denmark 2019 Qatar finished in the top four of the 2018 Asian Championship in Korea, winning the title thanks to coming back again from a half-time deficit in the final against Bahrain. Frankis Carol was named as Most Valuable Player in the final and he led the way for his side, scoring at crucial points in the 60 minutes to finish with eight goals, alongside his teammate, Bertrand Roine, who plays his club handball for Al Ahli SC in Doha. "Our team deserved to win the title," said Rivera after the final. "This achievement is a result of the hard work put in both by the team and the management over the past few years. The game was not easy. "There is no doubt that we are the best in Asia," he continued. "Our third straight title proves it beyond doubt.

Winning the Asian title was an ambitious project for us. I thank all the players for their efforts."

QATAR'S SCHEDULE

- Today: Angola vs Qatar
- Sunday 13 January: Qatar vs Egypt
- Monday 14 January: Hungary vs Qatar
- Wednesday 16 January: Qatar vs Sweden
- Thursday 17 January: Qatar vs Argentina
- Group D: Sweden, Hungary, Qatar, Argentina, Egypt, Angola
- Coach: Valero Rivera
- Key Players: Frankis Carol Marzo (left back), Daniel Saric (goalkeeper), Rafael Capote (left back)
- Qualification Information: 2018 AHF Men's Asian Championship - Winners
- History in Tournament: 1954-2001: DNQ, 2003: 16th, 2005: 21st, 2007: 23rd, 2009-2011: DNQ, 2013: 20th, 2015: 2nd, 2017: 8th

GOLF

Spieth plots return to the top

Reuters
Los Angeles

It has been a few years since Jordan Spieth was anointed one of golf's 'big three' with Jason Day and Rory McIlroy but the 25-year-old Texan believes he knows what he needs to do to get back into the top echelons of the game. Spieth, Day and McIlroy, all in their 20s, were ranked first, second and third in the world respectively at the end of 2015 and destined in some eyes to dominate the landscape for another decade. None has disappeared but they are now ranked eighth (McIlroy), 11th (Day) and 17th (Spieth) with attention having drifted away as their games have stagnated or backtracked. "I remember in 2015-16 the word(s) 'big three' being mentioned so many times in almost every interview and not one of us three has been talked about in the last couple of years," Spieth told reporters on Wednesday on the eve of the Sony Open in Hawaii. Following his nuptials in November, Spieth will make his first official start as a married man in Honolulu this week, hopeful that 2019 will signal a return to his previous greatness. He had the first so-so year of his still young career in 2018, finishing 31st in the PGA Tour's FedExCup rankings and without a victory for the first time since 2014. Spieth's decline was due in no small measure to the loss of his formidable mid-range putting prowess, as the previously insane percentage of putts he made in the 10-20-foot range dried up. He has been tight-lipped about the cause of his putting



Following his nuptials in November, Jordan Spieth will make his first official start as a married man in Honolulu this week.

problems but says all one day will be revealed. "Some day I'll explain what got off and it will be easier to understand," said Spieth. "I'm embracing the challenge to get back where I need to be. I practised hard but I practised hard the wrong way. Now I've got to reverse that. I know what's wrong with Jordan Spieth and I know what's right

with Jordan Spieth and I know how to get where I want to go within my golf game and have fun doing it." Spieth is part of the first full-field event of the year on the PGA Tour, part of a strong field at Waialae Country Club that includes world number four Justin Thomas and defending champion Patton Kizzire.

Japan wrestling star Yoshida taps out before Olympics

Tokyo: Japan's Saori Yoshida, a three-time Olympic gold medallist, confirmed yesterday she is retiring from wrestling despite "wavering" at the thought of missing the Tokyo 2020 Games. "I decided to retire with the feeling that I've done enough in wrestling," said Yoshida, who is a popular figure in Japan and regularly appears on local television shows. She admitted "wavering, with the feeling that I want to participate in the Tokyo Olympics," but said she had ultimately decided it was time to pass the baton to younger athletes. The 36-year-old topped the podium at three straight Summer Games between 2004 and 2012, but fell short of a fourth straight gold medal at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, settling for silver in the 53kg division. She was left in tears at the Rio games after her shock defeat by American Helen Maroulis, and said the experience meant the silver she earned then was the most memorable of all 17 of her medals. Yoshida began wrestling at the age of three in central Japan's Mie region, where her father ran a wrestling school.

BOXING

Pacquiao plays down presidency talk, eyes on Broner

AFF
Los Angeles

Manny Pacquiao played down reports linking him to a bid for the presidency of the Philippines on Wednesday, insisting he remained solely focused on the twilight of his boxing career. The 40-year-old boxer, already a member of the Philippines Senate, has been repeatedly linked to a future run for the presidency in his homeland where he remains a national hero. However Pacquiao told reporters on Wednesday he had put any future political aspirations on hold as he prepares to defend his World Boxing Association regular welterweight title against Adrien Broner on January 19 in Las Vegas. "A lot of people are saying that I can be the next President," Pacquiao said. "But I'm not thinking about that. I don't have plans right now. Whatever path that God gives to me I will fulfil it. Being a public servant is different from sports. It's more on the mind and a lot of problems, thinking about how to solve those problems in the country, and also to provide solution to those problems." Pacquiao is reuniting with longtime trainer Freddie Roach for his clash with Broner at the MGM Grand Garden Arena, following a two-year rupture in what was once regarded as one of the most tightly knit fighter-trainer relationships in boxing.

Roach, who had worked with Pacquiao for 15 years before they parted ways in 2017, said he is convinced the Filipino is eyeing a future run for the presidency. "I haven't spoken to him to about running for president but he wants to help the people and the best way to help people is to be the boss," Roach told reporters. "He probably wants to be the first President to win a world championship. He's always been guy who does 100 things at once." Pacquiao, 60-7 with two draws and 39 knockouts in a career that began in 1995, meanwhile came face to face with old rival Floyd Mayweather while attending an NBA game at the Staples Center on Tuesday. Mayweather scored a victory over Pacquiao in a lucrative 2015 bout before later heading into retirement. Speculation of a possible rematch has continued to rumble despite Mayweather's absence from the ring. For the time being though Pacquiao insists he is not looking past Broner. "My plan is one at a time," Pacquiao said. "I cannot say about the future until January 19. After that we'll have a press conference. Leave it as a question mark for now." However Pacquiao made it clear he is determined to reclaim his status as a serious force in the division. "I've accomplished what I wanted to accomplish," he said. "But I want to maintain my name at the top and to show that even at 40 years old I can still give the best of Manny Pacquiao, the speed, the power, everything."



Manny Pacquiao poses after his workout during the Media Day at Wild Card Boxing Club in Hollywood, California. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

India's Mary Kom becomes world's top woman boxer

AFF
New Delhi

India's Mary Kom rose to the top of the boxing world rankings yesterday, two months after becoming the first female boxer to win six world championships. The 36-year-old mother-of-three was ranked number one by the International Boxing Association (AIBA) in the Light Fly 45-48 kilogramme category, scoring 1700 points. Kom capped her 2018 campaign with her sixth world championship title after defeating Ukraine's Hanna Okhota by 5-0 in Delhi. Okhota is ranked number two in the world, with 1100 points. That victory took her past Ireland's Katie Taylor, and level with the men's record held by Cuban legend Felix Savon as the most successful pugilist ever at the world championships. She also won gold medals at the 2018 Commonwealth Games and the Silesian Open Boxing Tournament in Poland. She bagged a silver at the Strandja Memorial in Bulgaria. Kom won a silver at the inaugural women's world championships in 2001, kickstarting her



international career. She went on to win gold in each of the next five world championships. Kom, who was the subject of a Bollywood film in 2014, won bronze at the London 2012 Olympic Games. She is likely to miss the 2020 Tokyo Olympics as her 48kg category is not included in the Games roster.

HORSE RACING

Sharesa and Ebraz light up Julian Smart's evening

'If I get beaten with Ebraz, it's my fault. If I win with Ebraz, it's normal. They went fast, and the faster they go, he is always in with it...'

By Mikhil Bhat
Doha

Three absolute thrillers capped yesterday's horse racing action at Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's (QREC) Al Rayyan Park, with Julian Smart-saddled duo - Sharesa and Ebraz - and Alban de Mieuille-trained Gtnah topping the three big Purebred Arabian races.

In the HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Trophy, the QR500,000 Local Purebred Arabian feature, Theo Bachelot had Sheikh Khalifa bin Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani's Sharesa track last year's topper Molheb Al Naif coming on to the home straight in the mile. He then edged Harry Bentley's ride out at the post by half-a-length to not only send Smart into a spell of ecstatic yells, but also complete a hat-trick of wins this season.

In the penultimate race of the day, the Group 2 HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Cup, Bachelot was in the saddle for 2017 HH The Amir's Sword winner Ebraz, and the two built a comfortable gap in the final two furlongs of the mile-long contest.

With Umm Qarn's Tayf, helmed by Ronan Thomas of De Mieuille, giving chase, Ebraz pulled up a bit but Bachelot had the colt hold on enough for a half-a-length victory.

"If I get beaten with Ebraz, it's my fault. If I win with Ebraz, it's normal. They went fast, and the faster they go, he is always in with it. He almost won the race too easily, too early. So once he got to the front, he said, 'my job's done', and he has a tendency to do that. He scared me," Smart told *Gulf Times*.

Talking about Sharesa's victory in the finale, he said, "Beautiful filly. The plan worked to perfection. It was full of good horses but we picked Molheb Al Naif as the horse to beat. We were following him. She was hanging a little bit to the inside, but Theo then got her out, she showed a lovely little turn of foot, and got them right on the wire."

Smart had 10 victories to his name coming into yesterday's meeting. But the two big wins, have given his campaign a boost. "I hide nothing; we have had a terrible time. But to be honest, to win two Sheikh Abdullah races is fantastic," he said.

A blitz on the home straight by Smart's debutant Maxr turned HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Silver Cup into a spectacle but the gelding fell short as De Mieuille's ward, Gtnah, held her own to win the 2200m race for four-year-old Purebred Arabians.

As the field opened up coming off the final bend, Ronan Thomas



His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani (third from right), Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club chairman Issa al-Mohannadi (second from right) and QREC CEO Nasser Sherida al-Kaabi (right) with the winners of the HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Trophy after Sharesa won the mile-long race for local Purebred Arabians at the Al Rayyan Park yesterday. PICTURES: Juhaim



His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani (third from right), Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club chairman Issa al-Mohannadi (second from right) and QREC CEO Nasser Sherida al-Kaabi (right) with the winners of the HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Silver Cup after Al Shaqab Racing's Gtnah won the 2200m race for Purebred Arabians yesterday.

had Al Shaqab Racing's Gtnah edge forward while His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani's Maxr went really wide.

With Ryan Curatolo riding Maxr almost on the outer rail, the gelding made up ground and fast, coming threateningly close, even as Thomas-helmed Gtnah too moved out and the two were virtually inseparable at the post. The photos put Gtnah ahead by a short head, while Theo Bachelot-ridden Amman completed the top three.

"He (Maxr) has never run before, green. But he has shown that he can run. He moved far too left, and if the jockey had switched to the other side with the whip, he would have probably gone back in. But well, I can't be too greedy now," Smart joked after the evening's proceedings.

A fantastic ride by Eduardo Pedroza saw Ibrahim al-Malki-trained Pazeer register a dominant win in the Umm Qarn Trophy, yesterday's Thoroughbred feature.

Even as Al Shaman and Opera Baron set the pace early on, Abdulatif Hussain al-Emadi's colt had little trouble pulling away on the home straight before eas-



Jockey Theo Bachelot celebrates as he rides His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani's Ebraz back to the paddock after winning the HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Cup (Group 2 PA) yesterday.

ing past the post for almost a four length victory. Ivan Rossi-ridden Jewel House ensured a one-two for al-Emadi colours, while the second al-Malki ward in the race, Khataaf, completed the top three

under Jimmy Quinn. Sheikh Salman bin Jassim al-Thani's Al Muntathar was the second straight winner on the day for al-Malki and Pedroza.

The AF AlBahar colt, after com-

ing close thrice earlier this season with top three finishes, grabbed his third win in Qatar, topping the Majd Al Arab P/A Sprinter Championship (Gr3 PA).

The 1100m sprint saw Stephan



His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani (right) presents the Al Sabiq races winner's trophy to jockey Nasser Hamad Mubarak al-Hajri.

Ladadj guide Kasser to second place, while Ryan Curatolo was astride third-placed Bint Al Akaber.

Hadi Nasser al-Ramzani's charge, Hajaam, bounced back from a heavy defeat in a Group 2 run on his last outing with a thrilling quarter-of-a-length victory in the Yasmeen Cup, a Thoroughbred Handicap event for horses rated 70-90. Ridden by Tomas Lukasek in yesterday's 1850m run, the gelding edged out Jean Baptiste Hamel-ridden Rich History for the win at the post.

Mohamed Jassim Ghazali-trained Al Maftoon had finished runner-up in the last year's edition of the Charm Spirit Cup, a Thoroughbred Handicap event for horses rated 70-90.

With Harry Bentley in the saddle yet again, this time the gelding, owned by Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari, held off a valiant run on the outside by Deborah Moun-tain-trained French Encore to win the seven furlong run by three quarters of a length. Ryan Curatolo-ridden French Encore edged out Theo Bachelot and his partner Woodkid by a neck for second.

Earlier in the day, Rashid Mohamed al-Jehani's ward Es'hail, ridden by Gerald Avranche, finally shed his maiden status, having come close on a number of occasions earlier in his career, in the Very Nice Name Cup, a Thoroughbred graduation plate event.

RESULTS

Race 1: 1. Es'hail (Gerald Avranche), 2. Qatari Gold (Ronan Thomas), 3. Festive (Marco Casamento), 4. Al Mohalhal (Mathieu Pelletan). Won by: 4, Nk, 3/4. Time: 1:38.20. Owner: Khalid Rashid al-Mohannadi. Trainer: Rashid Mohamed al-Jehani.

Race 2: 1. Al Maftoon (Harry Bentley), 2. French Encore (Ryan Cura-

tolo), 3. Woodkid (Theo Bachelot), 4. First To Post (Eduardo Pedroza). Won by: 3/4, Nk, 1 3/4. Time: 1:25.81. Owner: Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari. Trainer: Mohamed Jassim Ghazali.

Race 3: 1. Hajaam (Tomas Lukasek), 2. Rich History (Jean Baptiste Hamel), 3. Off He Goes (Theo Bachelot), 4. Hajaj (Faleh Bughanaim). Won by: 1/4, 1, Shd. Time: 1:56.44. Owner: Al Jeryan Stud. Trainer: Hadi Nasser al-Ramzani.

Race 4: 1. Pazeer (Eduardo Pedroza), 2. Jewel House (Ivan Rossi), 3. Khataaf (Jimmy Quinn), 4. Al Shaman (Theo Bachelot). Won by: 3/4, 2 1/2, 3/4. Time: 2:03.71. Owner: Abdulatif Hussain al-Emadi. Trainer: Ibrahim al-Malki.

Race 5: 1. Al Muntathar (Eduardo Pedroza), 2. Kasser (Stephan Ladjadj), 3. Bint Al Akaber (Ryan Curatolo), 4. Caid De L'Ardus (Harry Bentley). Won by: 1, 1, Hd. Time: 1:13.67. Owner: Sheikh Salman bin Jassim al-Thani. Trainer: Ibrahim al-Malki.

Race 6: 1. Gtnah (Ronan Thomas), 2. Maxr (Ryan Curatolo), 3. Annan (Theo Bachelot), 4. AJS Moaddie (Tomas Lukasek). Won by: Shd, 3 1/4, Nk. Time: 2:34.30. Owner: Al Shaqab Racing. Trainer: Alban de Mieuille.

Race 7: 1. Ebraz (Theo Bachelot), 2. Tayf (Ronan Thomas), 3. Spaghetti (Harry Bentley), 4. Meelad (Mathieu Pelletan). Won by: 1/2, 6, 2 3/4. Time: 1:45.87. Owner: His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani. Trainer: Julian Smart.

Race 8: 1. Sharesa (Theo Bachelot), 2. Molheb Al Naif (Harry Bentley), 3. Aahil (Ronan Thomas), 4. AJS Al Rayyan (Tomas Lukasek). Won by: 1/2, Nk, 4 1/4. Time: 1:45.93. Owner: Sheikh Khalifa bin Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani. Trainer: Julian Smart.

RALLYING

Al-Attiyah extends Dakar lead

Agencies
Lima

Qatar rallying ace Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah kept his hopes of winning the Dakar Rally for the third time after extending his advantage over the chasing pack by topping the event's fourth stage, running from Arequipa to Tacna.

The Toyota driver was quickest over the 406-kilometre timed special, the longest of the rally thus far, split in two parts by a 55-kilometre neutralised zone.

The stage marked the first half of the rally's 'marathon' leg, so-called because external assistance is forbidden and technical support crews do not accompany the competitors to Tacna - instead waiting for their return to Arequipa the day after.

X-raid Mini buggy driver Stephane Peterhansel, who ran first on the road after topping Wednesday's test, was marginally quicker than al-Attiyah at the opening waypoint.

But the Qatari led at every split afterwards, arriving at the finish two minutes faster than the 13-time Dakar champi-



Toyota Gazoo's driver Nasser al-Attiyah and co-driver Matthieu Baumel in action in the Dakar Rally.

on, with a time of three hours, 38 minutes and 49 seconds.

Peterhansel, who lags nine minutes behind al-Attiyah in the general classification, has taken over in second place from fellow X-raid driver Yazeed al-Rajhi, who had a troubled run.

Fellow Mini 4x4 drivers Nani Roma and Jakub Przygonski have moved up to

third and fourth respectively as a result, with al-Rajhi a close fifth, now trailing al-Attiyah by 25 minutes.

PH Sport Peugeot privateer Sebastian Loeb was a close third behind al-Attiyah and Peterhansel for most of the day before tumbling to fifth at the very end of the stage. He now needs to make up more than 50 minutes relative to the

marathon leader.

Despite the late setback, Loeb has moved up to sixth overall, his gains coming at the expense of Bernhard ten Brinke - the Dutchman giving up over two hours for repairs to his Toyota - and Mini buggy driver Cyril Despres, who was relegated to seventh place after losing close to half an hour.

DOHA DARTS LEAGUE

Legacy stun Last Samurai in top of the table clash

The Doha Darts League returned after the end of year break and began with an upset as Legacy beat the Last Samurai 9-3, getting revenge for their 7-5 defeat earlier in the season.

Last Samurai headed into the top of the table clash, (as the top two teams met), on the back of 11 straight wins but were soundly beaten 9-3. At 3-3 the game was delicately poised but from then on it was just one-way traffic as Legacy, aided by some superb finishing, ran out resounding winners.

The Last Samurai still head the league table but their lead is reduced to 17 points with Legacy having a game in hand with just 9 weeks of the season remaining.

In the other games, Dart Vaders won a tight match against Who Dartsed 7-5 but Who Dartsed remain bottom of the table, Stray Qatz defeated GCC Rebels

8-4 and Exiles ran out comfortable winners 9-3 against GCC Renegades.

In other news, at the end of January the Doha Dart League brings two special events to Qatar.

On 24th January, an exhibition will be held featuring two stars of PDC, Devon "African Warrior" Petersen and Jamie "Jabba" Caven.

This is a chance to watch two professionals in action with selected Qatar residents taking on the professionals up on stage in a one leg challenge. Who will be able to say they beat a professional darts player?

Then on the 25th January is the Qatar Darts Open. This annual event is open to any Qatar residents to see who will be crown Darts Champion of Qatar for 2019. For further information and tickets for both events please visit, Facebook Page/Group: Qatar Darts Open.