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NBA | Page 5
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GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

West Indies recall Gayle for England ODI series

Page 7

SPOTLIGHT

PSG president al-Khelaifi elected to top UEFA body

AFP/DPA
 Rome

'I AM HAPPY TO BE PART OF THIS GREAT FOOTBALL FAMILY TODAY'

Nasser al-Khelaifi, the Qatari president of French giants Paris Saint-Germain, was yesterday officially appointed club representative on UEFA's Executive Committee, at the Congress of European football's governing body in Rome.

The 45-year-old had been elected at the end of January at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the European Club Association (ECA) which defends the interests of big European clubs and is chaired by Juventus president Andrea Agnelli.

But his candidacy had yet to be ratified and was done so during the UEFA Congress.

"I would like to thank again my esteemed colleagues at ECA for trusting me to represent them on the UEFA Executive Committee," said al-Khelaifi in a statement sent to AFP.

"It is a great honour and together with President Andrea Agnelli we will continue to work closely with UEFA to develop professional football in the interests of all stakeholders.

"I am happy to be part of this great football family today."

Al-Khelaifi takes over from Ivan Gazidis, former managing director of Arsenal and now in charge of AC Milan. The PSG president will represent the ECA on the UEFA Executive Committee along with Italian Agnelli.



Paris Saint-Germain's Qatari president Nasser al-Khelaifi (R) arrives for the UEFA Congress in Rome accompanied by PSG's head of communications Jean-Marie Ribes.

Meanwhile, UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin has revealed first details of a new UEFA streaming service and hopes to build bridges with FIFA after his re-election as president of the European football governing body with a four-year term yesterday.

The 51-year-old Slovenian Ceferin was elected by acclamation as the only candidate standing for president. "Thank you once again for placing your trust in me," Ceferin told delegates from the 55 member nations. "I am both touched and honoured."

Referring to a digital platform called OTT, Ceferin said: "We are fully aware that a revolution is under way, and are in the process of agreeing historic partnerships with the world's leading companies in this field." Commercial partner Alibaba could be involved in what Ceferin said were "new football technologies or joint e-commerce projects."

Ceferin took charge of UEFA in 2016 to complete the term of previous president Michel Platini who was banned for receiving a disputed payment. As UEFA president Ceferin is also ensured of a vice-president post within world governing body FIFA.

The two organizations have clashed recently over FIFA president Gianni Infantino's ambitions for a new global Nations League and a revamped Club World Cup. "We will be a source of constructive ideas for FIFA, rather than one of opposition," said Ceferin.

"We are ready to work with the world governing body to ensure that football remains the world's number one sport, and that Europe continues to lead the way."

Ceferin also encouraged a European bid for the 2030 World Cup after coming editions in Qatar (2022) and the United States, Mexico and Canada (2026). Al-Khelaifi was nominated for the ExCo by the influential European Clubs Association which is guaranteed two of the 20 spots on the body.

Hungary's Sandor Csanyi was re-elected as a FIFA vice-president and also a member of the UEFA ExCo where he is joined by Armand Duka (Albania), Fernando Gomes (Portugal), Jesper Moller Christensen (Denmark), Andrii Pavelko (Ukraine), Luis Rubiales (Spain) and Davor Suker (Croatia). German federation chief Reinhard Grindel was re-elected to the FIFA council where he, along with Ceferin, is likely to attempt to rein in Infantino, despite the president's promise for constructive co-operation.

Infantino had addressed the congress earlier where he reminded delegates that "football is global and deserves to be developed globally." The Swiss will stand unopposed for re-election as FIFA president in June but next month in Miami will restart discussions over his tournament projects. A potential \$25bn backing from unconfirmed investors remains a sticking point for UEFA who are also anxious not to undermine their own Champions League.

METEORIC

Qatar rocket in FIFA rankings to 55th; now ahead of Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt

Agencies
 Doha

Qatar have climbed a huge 38 places in the latest FIFA world rankings released yesterday, reaching their highest position in more than quarter of a century on the back of their victorious Asian Cup campaign.

The Al Annabi, who will host the World Cup in 2022, are now ranked 55th – just ahead of Cameroon and Egypt – after beating Japan 3-1 in last week's final in the United Arab Emirates. It is their highest ranking since 1993, while their best ever position still stands at 53.

Qatar's improvement was expected as six of the seven teams they defeated en route to winning the Asian Cup title were recorded against sides who were ranked higher than the Maroons going into tournament.

Qatar defeated Lebanon (81st rank) and Saudi Arabia (69) in the group stage before registering triumphs over Iraq (88), South Korea (53), United Arab Emirates (79) and Japan (50) in the knockout rounds. The only lower ranked team Felix Sanchez's side came up against were North Korea (109) in the group stage. Qatar are even ahead of Egypt, who are 57th.



Iran remain as the Asia's highest ranked team. Japan, whose bid for a fifth

Asian Cup title was thwarted by Qatar, also saw a surge in their ranking as they

improved by 23 spots to 27 to sit behind Iran, who improved by seven to move up

to 22. Iran's record of four wins and a draw

in UAE 2019 helped them stay on top, despite Team Melli losing 3-0 to Japan in the semi-finals. Japan registered six wins in UAE and the points earned saw them move up as the continent's second highest ranked team.

South Korea, shown the exit by Qatar in the quarter-finals, improved to 38 from 53 while Australia, whose defence of the Asian Cup title ended in the quarters, dropped by one to 42. The United Arab Emirates' run to the semi-finals of the AFC Asian Cup improved their ranking by 12 to 67 while Saudi Arabia dropped by one to 70. China PR (72), Iraq (80) and Syria (83) complete the Asian top 10.

Meanwhile, Belgium continue to lead the world rankings ahead of last year's World Cup winners France and Brazil, with no changes to the top 20 due to the lack of fixtures involving teams from the European and South American confederations.

FIFA Rankings

1. Belgium, 2. France, 3. Brazil, 4. Croatia, 5. England, 6. Portugal, 7. Uruguay, 8. Switzerland, 9. Spain, 10. Denmark
- Selected others:** 22. Iran (+7); 27. Japan (+23); 38. South Korea (+15); 55. Qatar (+38); 57. Egypt (-1); 67 UAE (+12); 70. Saudi Arabia (-1)

SPOTLIGHT

UEFA president Ceferin promises bright future in new term

AFP
Rome

UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin was handed a new four-year term yesterday and promised a bright future despite the “complex challenges” ahead for European football’s governing body. The 51-year-old Slovenian lawyer was the only candidate going forward for election at the UEFA Congress in Rome and was voted in by acclamation.

His election was in contrast to the situation when he took over two and a half years ago, with football in turmoil amid a corruption scandal that toppled his predecessor Michel Platini.

Ceferin told UEFA’s 55 member associations who elected him unopposed that “with unity restored” he was taking over with “fewer doubts and less scepticism than back then”.

“So, what’s going to happen now? That is the question many people were

asking when I was elected two and a half years ago,” said Ceferin.

“At that time, football, at both world and European levels, was being rocked by the most serious governance crisis in its history and yet you decided to entrust the keys to the UEFA house to a virtual unknown.”

Having previously been largely charged with putting in place measures voted for under the previous regime of Platini and current FIFA president Gianni Infantino, Ceferin can now hope to really make his mark and implement his own changes. “We are going to have to think ahead and undertake some major developments,” he added.

On top of his agenda for now is a battle with Infantino, who as FIFA president has been promoting a new, expanded Club World Cup and global Nations League. Ceferin is opposed to the projects. “We must not allow our recent, short-term successes to hide the much more complex challenges that lie ahead,” Ceferin warned. “The

most dangerous thing we can do is rest on our laurels and bask in our current situation.”

Ceferin promised to work closely with world football’s governing body, and is also hoping to bring the 2030 World Cup back to Europe. “With our unity restored, we will be a source of constructive ideas for FIFA, rather than one of opposition. And we expect the same attitude from FIFA,” he said.

Infantino was present in Rome and also extended an olive branch to his European counterpart. “We must be innovative. We must continue to develop. It can only be done if we work together, if we discuss, if we debate,” he said. “Let’s try to find what we have to do together to make up for lost time.”

Previously the head of the Slovenian Football Federation, Ceferin’s presidency so far has been less charismatic in his approach than that of Platini. The Frenchman is still suspended until October this year, when he will complete a four-year ban from all football-related

activities following the corruption scandal that also brought down then-FIFA chief Sepp Blatter.

“When crisis hits, it is not the time to suddenly forsake everything that has gone before. I am not the president of a ‘new UEFA’. I am the president of UEFA, a UEFA that can be proud of its past and confident about the future,” said Ceferin.

He also defended his record since taking over with his most notable achievement being the introduction of term limits for UEFA presidents, to a maximum of three four-year stints.

“Limited terms of office, the publication of salaries, the creation of a Compensation Committee and the inclusion of independent members in a reinforced Governance and Compliance Committee are just a few of the common-sense reforms we have introduced,” he said.

“This is only the start. We will be doing more in this area because there remain weaknesses in our system.”



UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin is in a pensive mood during a press conference in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

COPA DEL REY

Clasico leaves all options open for Barca and Madrid

After an impressive opening 20 minutes, Madrid were largely second best in a compelling match

AFP
Barcelona

Neither claimed a clear advantage but Barcelona and Real Madrid each had cause for optimism following a frantic 1-1 draw in the first leg of their Copa del Rey semi-final. “The result does not point to any clear favourite,” Barca coach Ernesto Valverde said after Wednesday night’s match. “The tie is open,” said Madrid’s Santiago Solari. “Anything can happen.”

Barcelona will have Lionel Messi available again for the return on February 27, after their captain was deemed fit enough only for 27 minutes of a compelling opener at Camp Nou. The thigh strain he sustained against Valencia last weekend is considered minor, with Valverde hopeful he will be able to start against Athletic Bilbao on Sunday. “If he is okay to play, he will but if he is not right, he won’t,” Valverde said. “But we hope he will be fine.”

Ousmane Dembele could also be back at San Mames and, along with Messi, the duo’s availability for the first of two Clasicos in four days at the end of the month would certainly make Barcelona stronger. They were sloppy for the best part of half an hour on Wednesday and Madrid might have taken the tie away from them had Vinicius Junior and Karim Benzema shown the same precision as Lucas Vazquez, who had nipped in at the front post in the sixth minute.

Instead, Barca kept the deficit to one and then took hold of the contest, their midfield seizing control before a nervy last 10 minutes. The only surprise was that Malcom’s equaliser shortly before the hour had not come sooner but Valverde’s side saved their best for the second leg in each of the previous rounds, and he will feel they are well-placed.

“The season is long,” Gerard Pique said. “We will try to win the second leg but there are many competitions before then and the league and Champions League are more important. We will try to reach the final.”

Madrid will take heart too, from a purposeful early spell that rattled Barcelona and then an extended show of resilience, the kind that was absent in their 5-1 hammering on the same turf in



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi (centre) vies for the ball with Real Madrid’s Marcelo (left) and Toni Kroos during the Copa del Rey semi-final first leg match at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Wednesday night. (AFP)

October. “Comparisons are unhelpful,” said Solari. “But it shows how hard the team have worked.”

A draw feels a long way off revenge but there was a measure of redemption at least for a side who can tag this result onto six victories in eight games, the only blemish a second leg defeat to Leganes in the quarter-finals, when

the tie was already all-but won. With an away goal secured and home advantage to come at the Santiago Bernabeu, Madrid’s only regret might be that they could not snatch a victory when the ball fell to Gareth Bale in the dying minutes. Marc-Andre ter Stegen was out of position but Bale’s shot was blocked by Nelson Semedo, a missed chance for

the Welshman, who had been left out of the starting line-up, demoted behind Vazquez and Vinicius. “We had chances to score a second goal but we leave satisfied with what we did,” Solari said.

Bale is still regaining sharpness after three weeks out with a calf injury but the brilliant form of Vinicius and the loyalty Vazquez enjoys from Solari means he

cannot take his place for granted. “Lucas has the virtues that I value most in the Spanish character,” Solari said. “He has solidarity and he is brave.”

Real face Atletico Madrid tomorrow in La Liga, when a win would see them jump above their city rivals into second in the table. Their resurgence remains on track.

Injured Xavi out of action for a month

Doha: Al Sadd captain Xavi Hernandez is to be out of action for four weeks due to an injury he sustained during training. The Spanish star, who got injured on his right foot, will undergo a treatment and rehabilitation programme for around a month before returning to action.

Al Sadd are preparing for the rest of QNB Stars League, which will resume on February 14th, and other competitions. They will play hosts to Al Khor on February 16th. Al Sadd players, who did duty for triumphant Qatar at the recent Asian Cup in the UAE, will join the squad on February 11th. The Wolves are leading the table with 38 points after 15 rounds.

QNB STARS LEAGUE TEAMS TO PLAY FRIENDLESS

Umm Salal and Al Ahli will face off in a friendly today. Umm Salal had recently lost to Chinese Super League side Jiangsu, who were camping in Doha. Umm Salal will play Al Gharafa on February 14th, while Al Ahli will face Al Kharaitiyat the next day. Umm Salal are eighth in the table with 17 points, while Al Ahli are fifth with 26 points.

Meanwhile, Al Sailiya are to play a friendly against Al Khor tomorrow. Sailiya will be away at Al Duhail on February 16th, while Al Khor will travel to Al Sadd the same day. Sailiya are third in the standings with 28 points, whereas Al Khor are 11th with nine points.



FOCUS

England stars inspire Generation Amazing coaches and Qatar team



The England women’s football team with their Qatari counterparts and members of the Generation Amazing programme during their recent winter camp in Doha.

The England women’s team took part in a training session with their Qatari counterparts and members of the Generation Amazing programme during their recent winter camp in Doha.

Organised by the Qatar Football Association (QFA) and Generation Amazing, the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy’s flagship football for development programme, the event focused on the importance of preparation, along with the impact of inspirational role models.

Generation Amazing coach Jafla al-Hajri said: “We had some great conversations with the players and, from what we observed, the training sessions we organise through Generation Amazing are going in the right direction.”

Al-Hajri continued: “The session helped me as a coach and player, and I’m looking forward to speaking about

this with other players and passing on my experience.”

England team spent a week training at Khalifa International Stadium – a proposed tournament venue for the 2022 FIFA World Cup – in preparation for this summer’s FIFA Women’s World Cup, which will take place in France.

Baroness Sue Campbell, Head of Women’s Football at the English Football Association, welcomed the opportunity to meet and inspire Qatar’s young footballers and members of Generation Amazing.

“We are here as part of our preparations for the World Cup in France,” said Baroness Campbell. “This is an amazingly inspirational stadium, but it is also about the opportunity to meet women here who are part of the incredible Generation Amazing programme. Sharing our experiences is part of what we are here to do.”

Lulwa al-Marri, President of the Qatar Women’s Sport Committee, handed over a Qatar national team jersey to England head coach Phil Neville and Baroness Campbell after the activity, and thanked the England players for inspiring the local girls.

Hosting the England women’s team in Qatar was organised after the countries’ respective football associations signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate and share expertise in several key areas, including women’s football, football development, grassroots football and youth development.

Mansoor al-Ansari, General Secretary of the QFA, said: “We were delighted to host the England women’s team for their winter training camp as part of their preparations for the World Cup. We hope the team enjoyed the exceptional facilities and got the best out of their visit.”

PREMIER LEAGUE

Guardiola vows City have desire to retain title

It was a far from inspired performance from City at Goodison Park

AFP
Liverpool

Pep Guardiola insisted Manchester City's 2-0 victory at Everton proved they are determined to win their title fight with Liverpool as the champions returned to the top of the table on Wednesday night.

It was a far from inspired performance from City at Goodison Park, but goals from Aymeric Laporte and Gabriel Jesus ensured they knocked Liverpool out of pole position on goal difference. Liverpool had occupied first place since December 8, but now the pressure is on Jurgen Klopp's side just five weeks after they could have moved 10 points clear of City.

With Liverpool showing signs of nerves after two successive draws damaged their bid for a first English title since 1990, City took advantage in a fixture which was brought forward due to their League Cup final date with Chelsea later this month.

It was a crucial victory and City manager Guardiola claimed his players have no intention of letting Liverpool off the hook now. "We come from champions and we are in a situation where we could have given up but it didn't happen," Guardiola said. "We gave an incredible game against Liverpool. These players have shown incredible desire and performances for the last two years. How could I question them? We have played one more game, but it's the best we can do. The reality is one month ago we could have been 10 points behind when we played Liverpool.

"A few days ago we could have been seven points behind. Now we are top of the league. That is the best advice, the lesson is - never give up. That is a lesson for all athletes. Try to win the games, because life can change immediately."

City struck at the best possible time when Laporte headed them in front in the second minute of first half stoppage-time. The opening goal came from a free-kick, needlessly conceded by Idrissa Gueye as he slid in late on Fernandinho, and taken by David Silva.

The Spanish midfielder curled in a perfect delivery which found Laporte unmarked, and only eight yards from goal, for a solid finish. It was the 16th consecutive league and cup game in which Guardiola's side has scored a first half goal, a run dating back to their first league defeat



Manchester City's Gabriel Jesus (centre) celebrates with teammates Fernandinho (left) and Bernardo Silva after scoring against Everton on Wednesday night. (Reuters)

of the season at Chelsea in early December. And in the context of the title race, it may yet prove to be one of the more important although it took until deep into stoppage-time of the second half for City to claim their second.

Kevin De Bruyne played in Jesus, whose initial run was blocked by Jordan Pickford, only for the ball to sit up kindly for the Brazilian to head into an open goal. That was enough to stretch City's goal advantage to seven over Liverpool and set up an intriguing weekend, when

Klopp's team must face Bournemouth 24 hours before the leaders host Chelsea on Sunday. "We have started the week well, (beating) Arsenal and here, now comes a big, big test, a big goal," Guardiola said. "Chelsea are an exceptional team who have had seven days to prepare. We have to prepare well. It really is a final for us this weekend. If we are able to take these points, it is a huge step forward."

Having survived a test of their nerve at Everton, City have no time to rest on their laurels. But Guardiola insisted he

won't complain about the hectic schedule. "I used to listen to what older managers - Sir Alex Ferguson, Rafa Benitez - what they said and complained about the schedules and nothing happened," he said. "I arrived here so I understand the situation. If we played just one competition, the schedule would be better but when you have to play four you have to adapt. So when the Premier League say we have to play there, we take the bus to play at the right time and, at the right moment, we play the game."

FRENCH CUP

PSG need extra time to beat minnows Villefranche

AFP
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain required extra time to overcome third-tier Villefranche 3-0 in the last 16 of the French Cup on Wednesday night. Holders and record 12-time champions PSG were held in check at Lyon's Groupama Stadium until Julian Draxler bundled in a cross from substitute Edinson Cavani on 102 minutes.

Moussa Diaby and Cavani sealed victory late on after both were set up for simple tap-ins by Kylian Mbappe, who came on for Angel Di Maria with an hour gone. PSG will host Dijon in the quarter-finals as they bid to win the competition for a fifth time in a row.

Thomas Tuchel's side face Bordeaux at home in the league this weekend before travelling to Old Trafford on February 12 for the first leg of their Champions League tie with Manchester United. "It's normal to have the match against Manchester United in one corner of your head even if we're trying to go step by step," said PSG defender Marquinhos. "You saw the coach looked to rest some players to best manage the squad. We're thinking about the important dates coming up."

Argentine midfielder Leandro Paredes made his first start

for PSG after his arrival from Zenit Saint Petersburg for a reported 47mn euros (\$54mn). "He played well, he was very reliable in the middle. He didn't lose the ball. He had a lot of quality in his passes. It wasn't easy and he was very good," Tuchel said of Paredes. PSG will be without Brazilian forward Neymar for both legs of the last-16 clash against United after the world's most expensive player suffered an injury to his right foot last month.

Elsewhere, Jordan Siebatcheu scored twice, including a 91st-minute winner, for Rennes as they came from behind to defeat 10-man Lille, who saw Adama Soumaoro sent off after just 19 minutes. Fourth-division Vitre reached the last eight of the French Cup for the first time in club history as a stoppage-time penalty completed a remarkable 3-2 victory, having trailed third-tier Lyon-Duchere by two goals. Lyon, who snapped PSG's unbeaten league run at the weekend, were visiting in Guingamp in the final of the last-16 games last night.

ROUND OF 16 FRENCH CUP

Villefranche 0 Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Draxler 102, Diaby 113, Cavani 119) aet
Vitre 3 (Gros 32, Le Borgne 41, Laurent 90+4-pen) Lyon-Duchere 2 (Rivas 8, 22)
Rennes 2 (Siebatcheu 74, 90+1) Lille 1 (Pepe 65)



Paris St Germain's Moussa Diaby (top) celebrates with Kylian Mbappe after scoring against Villefranche in the French Cup last 16 match in Lyon, France on Wednesday night. (Reuters)

SPOTLIGHT

Coman grabs winner as Bayern outlast Hertha in German Cup

AFP
Berlin

Kingsley Coman spared teammate Mats Hummels' blushes with an extra-time winner as Bayern Munich stumbled into the German Cup quarter-finals with a 3-2 win at Hertha Berlin on Wednesday. Hummels' defensive mistake had gifted Hertha an equaliser in the second half of normal time, but Coman's header ensured that Bayern huffed and puffed their way into the last four.

Hertha took the lead with a brutal counter-attack after just three minutes, Maximilian Mittelstaedt stroking the ball past Sven Ulreich, in Bayern's goal for the injured Manuel Neuer. Bayern hit back almost immediately through Serge Gnabry, who pounced on a loose ball and smashed in the equaliser on the half-volley.

Gnabry then put Bayern ahead just after half-time, surging into the box and slotting the ball inside the far post. Yet Hummels' howler brought Hertha back into the game on 67 minutes. The Bayern defender's weak header allowed Davie Selke to dart into the box and prod the hosts level. Hummels continued to look unsettled, and he will have been mightily relieved when Coman nodded in the winner eight minutes into extra time.

Meanwhile, Schalke cruised into the quarter-finals with a 4-1 home win over Fortuna Duesseldorf on an emotional evening for the hosts. The game kicked off amid a sombre atmosphere in the wake of news that Schalke's legendary, cigar-smoking former general manager Rudi Assauer had died aged 74. The mood was lightened on the half-hour mark, as Ahmed Kutucu curled the ball into the top corner to give Schalke the lead.



Bayern Munich's Kingsley Coman (right) shoots as Hertha Berlin's Valentino Lazaro dives to tackle during the German Cup third round match in Berlin. (Reuters)

Their second came from a corner just after the break. Winston McKennie forced a good save from Jaroslav Drobný, before Salif Sane pounced on the rebound. Mark Uth added a third from close range on 53 minutes. Rouven Hennings then chipped in a consolation goal for Duesseldorf before Sane sealed the win late on.

Earlier, 19-year-old Brazilian forward Matheus Cunha made history with his first-half winner, as RB Leipzig beat Wolfsburg 1-0 to reach the German Cup quarter-finals for the first time. Cunha fired Leipzig to an early lead on nine minutes, latching on to a sharp through ball from Lukas Klostermann and turning the ball into the bottom corner. Augsburg also progressed after a smash-

and-grab 1-0 victory away to second tier side Holstein Kiel. Kiel were left to rue an array of missed chances five minutes from time, when Michael Gregoritsch found the net against the run of play to send Augsburg into the quarter-finals. Hamburg, Paderborn, Heidenheim and Werder Bremen make up the list of quarter-finalists, having progressed on Tuesday.

LAST 16 GERMAN CUP RESULTS

Holstein Kiel 0 Augsburg 1 (Gregoritsch 85); RB Leipzig 1 (Cunha 9) Wolfsburg 0; Hertha Berlin 2 (Mittelstaedt 3, Selke 67) Bayern Munich 3 (Gnabry 7, 49, Coman 98) aet; Schalke 4 (Kutucu 30, Sane 48, 87, Uth 53) Fortuna Duesseldorf 1 (Hennings 71)

BODY FROM WRECKAGE OF SALA'S PLANE ARRIVES IN BRITAIN

Portland, United Kingdom: Investigators recovered a body underwater from the wreckage of a plane carrying Argentine footballer Emiliano Sala in the Channel and transported it to the British mainland yesterday for identification. Britain's Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) said that bad weather meant they were unable to recover the plane and as a result it was closing down the operation. The light aircraft was carrying the 28-year-old footballer to his new Premier League team Cardiff City when it disappeared near the British island of Guernsey on January 21, along with 59-year-old pilot David Ibbotson. Sala's disappearance prompted an outpouring of grief across the footballing world, including at his former club Nantes in France where the plane was flying from.

After search operations were suspended, a shipwreck hunter hired by Sala's family with funds donated by football stars such as Lionel Messi found the wreckage on Sunday. The body was taken to Portland Harbour in southern England on board the Geo Ocean III offshore supply ship. It was then stretched into a silver van, with Dorset Police confirming it had "left the boat and left the port", before being taken to a nearby mortuary for identification and a post-mortem. The AAIB, who took over the operation, had on Monday confirmed that an unidentified body had been found at the site. But it added: "The weather forecast is poor for the foreseeable future and so the difficult decision was taken to bring the overall operation to a close".

Sala was flying to join up with Cardiff City in what was

the most expensive signing in the Welsh club's history. Nantes have consulted lawyers to explore legal options to ensure Cardiff pay the transfer fee for Sala, a source close to the French club revealed on Wednesday.

According to the source, the first instalment of the 17-million-euro (\$19.3 mn) deal for the Argentine striker has yet to be paid, despite the transfer being finalised before the accident. According to BBC Wales, Nantes have given Cardiff a 10-day ultimatum over the first payment of between five and six mn euros.

A source at Cardiff told British media that the Welsh club will honour the contract but only once they have clarified "all the facts". Cardiff are said to be "surprised" with the timing of the demand so soon after the tragedy. (AFP)

FOCUS

Emery urges Arsenal to end away-day blues

AFP
London

Unai Emery admits Arsenal have no excuse for failing to improve their wretched away record when they face lowly Huddersfield tomorrow. Emery's side have lost their past three away games in the Premier League including a 3-1 loss at Manchester City last weekend.

With defeats at Southamp-

ton and West Ham among the other low-lights of Arsenal's travel-sick season, the thought of losing to bottom-of-the-table Huddersfield at the John Smith's Stadium is too much for Emery to stomach.

A 2-1 win at Bournemouth on November 25 was the last time Emery's side took three points on the road, but Huddersfield look the perfect opponents after losing 11 of their past 12 league games. Asked yesterday if a win this weekend was essential,

Emery told reporters: "Yes. We started very well away, changing our mentality, but now we need to recover this confidence, to recover this performance and the next opportunity is against Huddersfield."

"For us as well, away games have been a challenge and each match is a new challenge. Each match is also a very big opportunity for us to fight for the possibility to take three points and continue better than how we are doing in away games now."

GOLF

A world record and a hole-in-one at pioneering Vic Open

The day was marked by Australia's James Nitties carding a world record-equalling nine birdies

AFP
Geelong, Australia

A world record and a hole-in-one marked the opening day of a pioneering golf tournament in Australia yesterday where the men's and women's events are played at the same time.

The Vic Open is the only tournament in the world with male and female fields teeing off, in alternate groups, on the same course and for equal prize money.

It has been running as a dual male-female event for six years.

But the tournament took on added significance this year with the European Tour and the US-based LPGA Tour jointly sanctioning it for the first time, with prize money significantly boosted.

Played at the 13th Beach Golf Links south of Melbourne, local hope Ned Flanagan, a former US amateur champion, shot a 10-under-par 62 — one shy of the course record — for a two shot lead among the men.

"Just had one of those days where everything seemed to kind of go right," said Flanagan.

On the women's side, England's Felicity Johnson hit a 65, two in front of a group including Australia's Su Oh, who nailed a spectacular hole-in-one at the 149 metre 15th hole.

"There was this one guy near the green who said it just trickled in. So I had one guy see it, which was good enough," she said.

Reigning British Open champion Georgia Hall hit a 70, while world number seven Minjee Lee could only muster 72.

The day was marked by Australia's James Nitties carding a world record-equalling nine birdies in a row.

It matched the feat first accomplished by Mark Calcavecchia at the 2009 Canadian Open on the



Pernilla Lindberg of Sweden hits out of a bunker during the first round of the Vic Open golf tournament at the 13th Beach Golf Links at Barwon Heads near Melbourne yesterday.

US PGA Tour and was the first time it had officially been achieved on the European Tour.

"I'm pumped," said Nitties, the world number 668 who was two shots behind leader Flanagan. "I don't hold any other world records that I know of, so to be a part of one is pretty cool."

Australian Geoff Ogilvy, who won the 2006 US Open and three World Golf Championships, hit a 66 in his opening round and said the format was

a win-win.

"People are noticing because of the equal prize money and the LPGA and the guys and girls' thing. That's a big deal," he said.

Fellow Australian Karrie Webb, who has 41 wins on the LPGA Tour and carded a 73, is also a supporter of the progressive concept.

"I think all of us here in Australia have known how great this event is since its conception of

equal prize money for men and women," she said.

"And the way it's done, too, because a lot of people think, 'Oh, the women will be on one course, the men will be on the other'.

"The way it's alternating groups of men and women, I think it's great for the golf fan that comes to watch because they can watch the best of both men and women and sit on one hole and watch that all day."

SPOTLIGHT

Golf chiefs clarify caddie rule after penalties

AFP
Los Angeles

Golf chiefs on Wednesday clarified new rules on caddie alignment following separate incidents at recent events which saw two players controversially hit with stroke penalties.

China's Li Haotong was slapped with a two-shot penalty at the Dubai Desert Classic while Denny McCarthy received an identical sanction at the Waste Management Phoenix Open in Arizona.

Both incidents arose from confusion over the application of rule 10.2b (4) which governs where a caddie may stand when a player is making a stroke.

The new rule introduced this season bars caddies from standing behind a golfer once the player has begun to address their ball.

Li was punished when his caddie moved to his side after he had begun his putting stance while McCarthy was sanctioned for a similar offence.

Although the Royal & Ancient later said Li had been correctly sanctioned in line with the rules, McCarthy's penalty was revoked after tournament officials said other players had not been punished for the same offence.

The R&A and USGA sought to clear up the confusion on Wednesday in a statement clarifying application of the rule.

The two golf bodies said that if a player backs away from taking a stance, he was not now "considered to have begun a stance for the stroke."

"Therefore, a player can now back away from his or her stance anywhere on the course and avoid a breach of Rule 10.2b(4) if the caddie had been standing in a location behind the ball," a statement said.

Players would also only be punished if a caddie was "deliberately" aware that a player was entering a stance to take a stroke and was standing "on or close" to the line of play behind the ball.

"Experience has taught us that introducing a new rule requires us to balance patience with a willingness to act quickly when necessary," USGA senior managing director of governance Thomas Pagel said in a statement.

"With so many pivotal changes to the rules this year, we've committed to offering any assistance needed in making the rules easier to understand and apply, without taking away the inherent challenge of playing the game."

Career will not be defined by a few bad years, says Spieth

Reuters, Los Angeles

Jordan Spieth has not lifted a trophy since the 2017 British Open and has drifted to 21st in the world rankings but the Texan says he would have had a good career even if he never wins again and that he will not go chasing results.

The former world number one triumphed 11 times on the PGA Tour before turning 24 but is coming off the first disappointing year of his career.

He has seemed out of sorts since a poor final round at last year's British Open at Carnoustie, where he shared the lead starting on Sunday before fading to a tie for ninth.

Spieth returns this week to Pebble Beach, where he won two years ago, for the PGA Tour's Pebble Beach Pro-Am that is played on three courses on the Monterey Peninsula in northern California.

"Your career is not defined by a couple of bad years and I could have

really poor years the rest of my career and still have a pretty fantastic career," Spieth told reporters on Wednesday.

"If I think about it that way it certainly makes me happier, frees me up a bit. I'm in a good place now."

Pebble Beach will also host the US Open in June when the course is likely to be much drier than the damp, lush conditions that will greet players this week after recent heavy rains.

Spieth is part of a field that also includes world number three Dustin Johnson, who won the European Tour's Saudi International on Sunday.

Whether or not this is the week Spieth finds the missing ingredient, he thinks his game is moving in the right direction.

"Sometimes that means results are coming soon, sometimes they're coming later, but they're coming," he added.

"I'm not going to chase them as hard as last year because you can get hurt doing that, you can get into some bad patterns."



LOCAL MOTORSPORTS

Al-Sulaiti aims to wrap up title ahead of last rd.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The stage is set for another exciting round of the Qatar Superstock 600 (QSTK600) and Qatar Touring Car Championship (QTCC) this weekend at Losail International Circuit.

After the great performance and double victory of Abdulla al-Qubaisi in the last round, the young Qatari will push hard to close the gap in the standings, as there are only two rounds left in the championship and he stands a chance to win it.

Saeed al-Sulaiti is leading the championship with 140 points and al-Qubaisi is second with 119 points.

"I am really looking forward for another exciting round this weekend and I will try to win both races again to secure the championship before the last round. On the last track day, I wasn't feeling very good so I couldn't push the bike too much. But hopefully this weekend we have a good set up and will be focused for another win," said al-Sulaiti.

Mishal al-Naimi is third in the standings with 104 points and cannot make any mistake this weekend if he wants to keep fighting for the title.



"In the last round I had some problems with the tyres and the front fork of the bike. On the last track day, I tried a different set up and I reduced my lap timings, so hopefully I can have the same rhythm for the race this weekend," said al-Naimi.
Jassim al-Thani is leading the QSTK

Trophy with the maximum points, 150 points, as he has won all the rounds in his category. Kuwaiti rider, Mohamed al-Zaidan is second with 120 points and Hassan al-Mansoori third with 83 points.

This weekend will be also the penultimate round of the Qatar Touring Car Championship, and the leader, Abdulla al-Khelaifi (96 points) will try to extend the points lead to secure another championship title, as he has a considerable lead in the standings, with the second-placed Hamad al-Sulaiti way behind on 52 points.

"My goal is to secure 20 points this round to take the championship title before the last round. Good luck to everyone else and I am looking forward to an exciting battle this round," said al-Khelaifi.

The proceedings today will begin at 9am and finish at 4.10pm. Tomorrow (Saturday), the QSTK race 1 will start at 11.10am and the QTCC race 1 at 1pm. There is free entrance for all the fans at the grandstand and also at the Pad-dock.

Qatar Superstock 600 and Qatar Touring Car Championships are organised by the Losail Circuit Sports Club and Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation with Pirelli Qatar as sponsor.

MOTOGP

Vinales blazes to first in Sepang testing

AFP
Sepang

Yamaha's Maverick Vinales made a late charge to finish first on day two of the MotoGP pre-season test in Malaysia yesterday, while champion Marc Marquez slipped to eighth after suffering with an injured shoulder.

Vinales of Spain, who rode 63 laps in Sepang, pulled off an incredible performance in the closing moments to post the fastest time of 1min 58.897sec.

Rival Alex Rins, on a Suzuki, maintained his overnight position and was 0.527 seconds behind his countryman. Jack Miller made a big improvement on his Ducati to finish third with 1min 59.517sec. The Australian had ended 11th on Wednesday.

Meanwhile MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez slipped from first to eighth, complaining of pain from his left shoulder after surgery in December.

The 25-year-old reigning and five-time champion completed only 37 laps, fewer than half the number of laps completed by some riders. He underwent a four-hour shoulder op-



Yamaha Factory Racing's Spanish rider Maverick Vinales steers his bike during the first day of the 2019 MotoGP pre-season testing at the Sepang International Circuit in Sepang yesterday.

eration in December.

"In the beginning, I felt better than yesterday. Then immediately in the 2nd and 3rd runs I started to feel the energy go down on the shoulder and

started to lose power and more pain," he said after ending his test runs much earlier than planned.

But Marquez quickly downplayed concerns about not being ready for the opening Qatar race in March.

"I will not be 100% in Qatar... but it will not be a big problem. My target is to arrive in Argentina 100%," he said, referring to the season's second race on March 31.

Marquez also said he was not prepared to push hard during the Sepang test due to fears that it could cause inflammation to his shoulder muscles.

"I can keep riding and riding in pain but the problem is if I have a big inflammation... I lose one week of my recovery," he said.

Ducati rider Italian Andrea Dovizioso set the early pace on day two but finished fourth, 0.665sec off the fastest rider.

Englishman Cal Crutchlow, returning from the ankle injury that ended his 2018 season early, put up a strong performance on his LCR Honda to end fifth.

Valentino Rossi, in his 24th year of motorcycle grand prix, was sixth.

The official first pre-season test runs ends today.

NBA

Warriors beat Spurs, Harden extends scoring streak

'Just tried to be aggressive coming into the game, trying to make plays for my teammates'

AFP
Los Angeles

The Golden State Warriors eased to the top of the Western Conference on Wednesday, outclassing an under-strength San Antonio Spurs to score a comprehensive 141-102 win at the Oracle Arena.

San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich rested star players LaMarcus Aldridge and DeMar DeRozan citing "load management", and could only watch as the powerful Warriors romped away with an emphatic win.

The reigning NBA champions started with five NBA All-Stars in their line-up - Kevin Durant, Draymond Green, DeMarcus Cousins, Klay Thompson and Stephen Curry - and had opened up a 66-52 lead at half-time.

An explosive third quarter saw the Warriors outscore their opponents by 49-31 to make the fourth quarter a formality.

Warriors coach Steve Kerr was satisfied at the ruthless streak shown by his side against their depleted opponents.

RESULTS

Brooklyn	135-130	Denver
New Orleans	125-120	Chicago
Milwaukee	148-129	Washington
Dallas	99-93	Charlotte
Utah	116-88	Phoenix
Houston	127-101	Sacramento
Golden State	141-102	San Antonio

"Reality kind of set in in terms of the talent disparity with their guys being out," Kerr said.

"We kind of wore them down. It's important on a night like tonight, when you know that the other team's best two players aren't out there, that you stay focused.

"I was happy that our guys were able to do that."

Thompson led the scoring with 26 points for the Warriors, with Durant posting 23 points and Curry 19. Cousins also had 15 points while Kevon Looney and Andre Iguodala had 11 off the bench.

The Warriors now lead the West with 38 wins and 15 losses, pulling 1.5 games clear of second-placed Denver, who suffered a 135-130 defeat to Brooklyn.

D'Angelo Russell once again led the scoring for the Nets with 27 points on a night when seven players cracked double digits for Brooklyn.

The defeat left Denver second in the West with a record of 37-17.

Elsewhere Wednesday, James Harden extended his red-hot scoring streak as the Houston Rockets overwhelmed the Sacramento Kings on the road.

Harden scored 36 points in a 127-101



Houston Rockets guard James Harden (left) controls the ball against Sacramento Kings guard Bogdan Bogdanovic during the first quarter at Golden 1 Center. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

win for the Rockets, the reigning MVP's 28th straight game where he has scored 30 points or more.

Gerald Green added 25 from the bench while starters Eric Gordon (20) and Chris Paul (15) backed Harden with useful contributions.

The win saw Houston improve to 32-22, leaving them in fifth spot in the Western Conference playoff race.

In the East, Giannis Antetokounmpo underscored his potential MVP credentials with a scintillating 43-point display as the Milwaukee Bucks bagged their 40th win of the season with a 148-129 rout of the Washington Wizards.

Antetokounmpo led a dominant offensive display by the Bucks, who now own the best record in the NBA and lead the

Eastern Conference Standings with 40 wins against 13 defeats. It was the latest in a series of superb performances this season by Antetokounmpo, who has thrust himself firmly into the conversation for MVP honours in recent weeks.

"Just tried to be aggressive coming into the game, trying to make plays for my teammates," the 24-year-old Greek forward said.

Milwaukee earned their fifth straight win after pouring on 50 points in the first quarter against a Wizards side who were rarely in contention.

Milwaukee led 85-65 at half-time and although the Wizards stormed back with a 42-point third quarter, the result was never seriously in doubt.

Antetokounmpo drained all three of his

three-point attempts as he made 17 of 21 attempts.

The Bucks star attributed his stellar display to a relaxed approach. "I just tried not to think about it and to just shoot the ball," he said. "That's what my team told me to do and that's what I'm going to keep on doing."

Antetokounmpo was one of six Bucks players to make double figures, with Eric Bledsoe posting 22 points along with 11 assists and six rebounds.

Malcolm Brogdon made 18 points and Khris Middleton finished with 16. Ersan Ilyasova added 12 from the bench.

Washington also poured on the points, with Bradley Beal adding 30 while Thomas Bryant finished with 26. Jeff Green had 22 points.

SPOTLIGHT

ICSS INSIGHT joins global partners to promote good governance in sport

ICSS INSIGHT and an international coalition of organisations from different sectors have joined forces for a project called BIG4SPORTS.

The two and half year project, was launched at the Museum of Sport in Barcelona, with the aim of connecting public and private funding sources with sport organisations through the development of innovative programmes for good governance in sport.

Co-funded by the European Commission within the framework of ERASMUS+ and coordinated by the European Platform for Sports Innovation (EPSI), BIG4SPORTS will identify and develop best practice to enhance good governance within sport organisations, particularly clubs and grassroots sports, with a view of increasing support and funding from public and private entities.

The BIG4SPORTS project is built on the vision to combine capacity and knowledge across multiple sectors, including public authorities, the sport industry and sport organisations. In the field of good governance in order to assure the highest standards in the management of sport and therefore increase public and private sector's trust towards stakeholders in sport.

BIG4SPORTS will build on existing international frameworks related to good governance in sport, making reference, in particular, to relevant poli-

cies developed by the IOC, the Council of Europe, the European Union and the Sport Integrity Global Alliance (SIGA).

The involvement of several sport clubs in the project will ensure the implementation of good governance mechanisms developed by BIG4SPORTS for real situations, in view of a possible adoption on a wider scale.



Alberto Bichi, EPSI Executive Director, said: "By strengthening this collaboration, the project aims to establish the best and most relevant standards in terms of corporate and public governance and develop a comprehensive methodology to reinforce sporting organisations' good governance capacities."

Massimiliano Montanari, CEO of ICSS INSIGHT said: "Wherever the source of funding comes from, good governance within sporting bodies, is a crucial condition which should be fulfilled in order to manage such funding. The sporting industry sponsors will only continue to commit to sponsorship agreements with those sporting organisations equipped with solid levels of governance, responsibility and accountability."

Durant lashes media amid Knicks rumours

Golden State Warriors star Kevin Durant lashed out at the media on Wednesday following reports linking him to a move to the New York Knicks.

Speculation over Durant's future has intensified during the free agency window after the Knicks traded Kristaps Porzingis and other players to the Dallas Mavericks on February 1.

Durant, who has not spoken to the media since the Porzingis trade, broke his silence on Wednesday following Golden State's rout of San Antonio.

The two-time NBA champion and Finals MVP has been repeatedly linked to a move to the Knicks when he becomes a free agent at the end of the season. However the 30-year-old insisted on Wednesday he was not thinking about his future, and attacked reporters for "twisting" his comments.

"I don't think about that type of stuff, that's your job," Durant said. "You all piling on me because I don't want to talk to y'all about that. I have nothing to do with the Knicks, I don't know who traded Porzingis, it ain't got nothing to do with me. I'm trying to play basketball."

When pressed further, he told reporters: "Y'all come here every day, ask me about free agency, talk to my team-mates, talk to my coaches, rile up the fans about it. Now when I don't want to talk to you all, it's a problem with me? Come on man. Grow up."

Asked why he was reluctant to speak to the press, Durant added: "I just don't trust any y'all. Every time I say something, it gets twisted up and thrown out in so many publications. Trying to tear me down with my words. And then when I don't say nothing, it's a problem."

"I just want to play ball. I want to go to the gym and go home. Is that a problem?" Asked to comment on Golden State's form following their 141-102 win, Durant abruptly walked out of the press conference. "I'm done," he told a reporter.

"You know you don't care about that."

NHL

Rangers edge Bruins in seven-round shootout

Reuters
New York

Tony DeAngelo scored in the seventh round of a shootout Wednesday night for the New York Rangers, who stormed back from a two-goal, third-period deficit to edge the visiting Boston Bruins 4-3.

Neither team scored in the first two shootout rounds before the Rangers' Mika Zibanejad and the Bruins' Brad Marchand exchanged goals in the third round. After three more scoreless rounds, DeAngelo beat Bruins goalie Jaroslav Halak before David Krejci misfired for Boston.

Zibanejad scored in the first period before Danton Heinen, David Pastrnak and Patrice Bergeron scored in the second to give the Bruins a 3-1 lead.

The Rangers forced overtime when Kevin Hayes and Filip Chytil scored in a span of 3:17 in the third period.

Goalie Alexandar Georgiev made 27 saves through regulation and overtime for the Rangers, who ended a two-game losing streak. Halak recorded 36 saves in regulation and overtime for the Bruins, who had a two-game winning streak snapped.

The Rangers went ahead with 2:15 left in the first, when the red-hot Zibanejad swooped in between the faceoff circles and fired a shot that sailed past Halak's glove. Zibanejad has 10 goals and 16 points since Jan. 15.

The Bruins scored three times in a span of fewer than five minutes in the second half of

the second period. Heinen opened the sequence at 10:37, when his redirect of a slap shot by Matt Grzelcyk fluttered over Georgiev's shoulder and into the net. Pastrnak put the Bruins ahead just 1:12 later, when he was stationed in the crease, took a feed from Krejci and beat Georgiev from point-blank range. Boston extended the lead to 3-1 on a power-play goal by Bergeron, who redirected Torey Krug's slap shot with 4:49 left. The Rangers tied the game in quick fashion in the third.

Hayes capped an end-to-end rush by putting back the rebound of a Jimmy Vesey shot at the 9:24 mark. New York tied the game with 8:19 remaining, when Pavel Buchnevich's shot glanced off the left post and skittered to Chytil, who fired the puck off the right post and into the net as Halak was left sprawling in front of the net.

RIELLY BREAKS TIE AS LEAFS HOLD OFF SENATORS

Morgan Rielly scored the go-ahead goal midway through the third period, and the Toronto Maple Leafs held off the visiting Ottawa Senators for a 5-4 victory Wednesday night.

Zach Hyman and John Tavares each produced a goal and an assist for the Maple Leafs, who won their third straight. Andreas Johnsson and Auston Matthews also scored. Mitch Marner added two assists.

Magnus Paajarvi scored twice and Matt Duchene and Thomas Chabot each scored once for the Senators, who have lost five in a row. Jean-Gabriel Pageau had two assists. Frederik Andersen made 40 saves for Toronto.

Ottawa's Craig Anderson stopped 25 shots. Marner's pass from the left circle connected with Hyman at the goalmouth, and Hyman tipped the puck in for his 10th goal of the season at 7:46 of the first period.

Paajarvi tied the game at 17:18 of the first, taking a pass from Pageau near the Toronto blue line, cutting through the middle and shooting from the right hash marks.

Ottawa led 2-1 at 1:35 of the second period on Duchene's 22nd goal this season, a sharp-angled shot from the left of the net to the top corner. Ryan Dzingel set it up after taking a rebound from in front of the goal and nudging the puck back to Duchene.

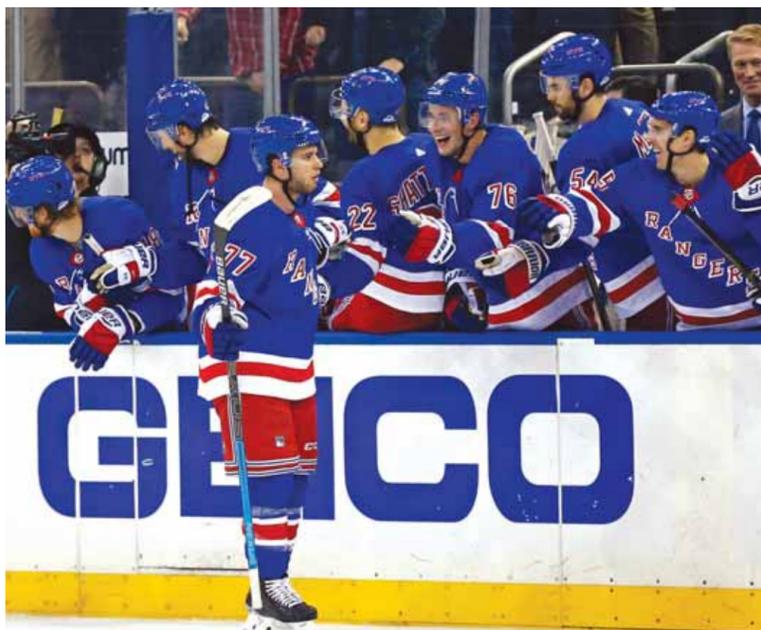
Toronto tied it at 14:20 of the second on Johnsson's 13th goal, on a backhand from the right circle. An attempted Ottawa clearance had bounced off the shaft of Frederik Gauthier's stick to Johnsson.

Toronto led 3-2 after Matthews, who signed a five-year contract extension this week, notched No. 24, unassisted, at 16:29 of the second. He lugged the puck toward the goal and lost it before regaining it and scoring. Tavares converted a goalmouth pass from Marner for his 32nd this season at 18:20 of the second to give Toronto a 4-2 lead.

Chabot scored his 11th goal, firing home a loose puck in the slot 40 seconds into the third period.

Paajarvi tied the game 4-4 at 3:59 of the third, knocking home Zack Smith's rebound for his seventh goal this season.

Rielly restored Toronto's lead with his 14th goal on a give-and-go with Hyman at 9:12 of the third.



New York Rangers defenseman Tony DeAngelo celebrates scoring a goal during a shootout against the Boston Bruins at Madison Square Garden. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

RUGBY

Ireland make five changes for 'second chance' against Scots

'We talk about continuity but I think it's a fantastic opportunity'

Reuters
Dublin

Ireland made five changes, four of them enforced through injury, to the team that will travel to Scotland today in a bid to kickstart their Six Nations defence after a disappointing opening loss to England.

Ireland lost number eight CJ Stander, lock Devin Toner and centre Garry Ringrose to injuries sustained in the 32-20 defeat and added Robbie Henshaw to the list on Thursday after he failed to recover from a dead leg and train properly this week.

Henshaw was expected to return to the more familiar role of centre, allowing Rob Kearney to return to fullback but his absence hands Chris Farrell an opportunity in the midfield while Jack Conan and Quinn Roux replace the injured men in the pack. The only other change sees Sean O'Brien favoured over Leinster teammate Josh van der Flier at flanker.

"We talk about continuity but I think it's a fantastic opportunity. We could be struck with a similar circumstance to what we had four years ago," Ireland coach Joe Schmidt said of the changes, referencing the 2015 World Cup when his side did not have the depth to cope with a string of frontline absentees.

"We need to be able to be flexible, we need to be able to have guys transition in and out as seamlessly as possible so that's an opportunity that's presented itself and maybe there would have been a bit of that anyway."

Schmidt last week bemoaned his side's habit of starting slowly having failed to win their opening Six Nations game for the third time in four years, and said on Thursday that the bruising defeat had stung for much of the week. "It is hard to suddenly hit the ground running but there's no way we want to volunteer any excuses because there none. You've got to get out and you've got to play well in the first game," he told a news conference.

"That hurt for sure and there weren't too many guys who slept well on Saturday night. It prob-



England's centre Manu Tuilagi (centre) runs with the ball during the Six Nations match against Ireland at the Aviva Stadium in Dublin on February 2. (AFP)

ably took us until today to really get a spring back in our step and really get hungry because we can't pass up a second opportunity."

TEAM

15-Rob Kearney, 14-Keith Earls, 13-Chris Farrell, 12-Bundee Aki, 11-Jacob Stockdale, 10-Jonathan Sexton, 9-Conor Murray, 8-Jack Conan, 7-Sean O'Brien, 6-Peter O'Mahony, 5-Quinn Roux, 4-James Ryan, 3-Tadhg Furlong, 2-Rory Best (captain), 1-Cian Healy
Replacements: 16-Sean Cronin, 17-Dave Kilcoyne, 18-Andrew Porter, 19-Ulтан Dillane, 20-Josh van der Flier, 21-John Cooney, 22-Joey Carbery, 23-Jordan Larmour.

Italy make two changes to team for Wales clash

Italy have made only two changes to their team to face Wales in the Six Nations on Saturday in a nod from coach Conor O'Shea to their late comeback in their season opener away to Scotland last weekend.

Italy were 33-3 down going into the last 10 minutes of the game at Murrayfield but ran in three quick unanswered tries to eventually go down 33-20 in a late statement of their potential.

Nicola Quaglio is the only change in the pack as he comes into the front row in place of Andrea Lovotti, who misses out because of a bout of flu.

Michele Campagnaro moves

from wing to centre to replace Tommaso Castello, who is also sick, which allows Edoardo Padovani, one of the try scorers last week, to come into the starting XV.

Guglielmo Palazzani started last week in Scotland as a last-minute replacement when Tito Tebaldi was injured in the warm-up and continues at scrumhalf with experienced Edoardo Gori, who has 68 caps, as his back up on the bench.

Italy will be looking to snap a run of 17 matches without success in the Six Nations. They have won twice in their past 26 games against the

Welsh, both in Rome back in 2003 and 2007.

Team: 15-Jayden Hayward, 14-Edoardo Padovani, 13-Michele Campagnaro, 12-Luca Morisi, 11-Angelo Esposito, 10-Tommaso Allan, 9-Guglielmo Palazzani, 8-Sergio Parisse (captain), 7-Brahm Steyn, 6-Sebastien Negri, 5-Dean Budd, 4-David Sisi, 3-Simone Ferrari, 2-Leonardo Ghiraldini, 1-Nicola Quaglio
Replacements: 16-Luca Bigi, 17-Cherif Traore, 18-Tiziano Pasquali, 19-Federico Ruzza, 20-Marco Barbini, 21-Edoardo Gori, 22-Ian McKinley, 23-Tomasso Benvenuti.

SPOTLIGHT

AITA sure of India's visit to Pakistan for Davis Cup tie

IAN S
Kolkata

A day after the Indian Davis Cup team were drawn to play Pakistan in an away tie, the All India Tennis Association (AITA) expressed confidence that it will be able to send the contingent to the neighbouring country despite the Indian government's policy of not allowing sports teams to travel there. The tie is scheduled for September.

"I am confident we will be cleared to go to Pakistan. We have been drawn to play them in their den. If we can't go, we will be banned for two years," AITA secretary general Hironmoy Chatterjee told IANS over phone.

The winner will move to the World Group Qualifiers.

Chatterjee's confidence stems from the fact that Pakistan were allowed to take part in the Hockey World Cup here recently. "Pakistan were in Bhubaneswar (Hockey World Cup) and likewise we will travel to their country," he said.

When pointed out that the government has not allowed the Indian cricket team to travel to Pakistan for any bilateral series, Chatterjee said: "Cricket is not an Olympic sport. Tennis is an Olympic sport and this is the World Cup of tennis. The ITF (International Tennis Federation) decides the venue and we have been drawn to play in Pakistan, and we will go."

No Indian Davis Cup squad has travelled to Pakistan since March 1964. In that tie in Lahore, India had prevailed over their rivals 4-0.

"It will be difficult for us then (if India is banned) to get

back to the World Group. We share a good relation with the Pakistan Tennis Federation and have no problems in travelling," he said, rubbishing reports that the tie might be held on a neutral venue.

The draw for the tie took place in London.

In the last week's World Group Qualifier, India were beaten 3-1 by Italy at the Calcutta South Club here.

Chatterjee further said Pakistan will decide the venue and the surface by June 25 and send the nomination to India, after which the AITA will arrange for visas for players and coaching staff.

This is an away tie for India since the last time the two nations had met in Mumbai. India had then won the tie 3-2. Before that, India and Pakistan played at a neutral venue in Malaysia in 1973.

Current non-playing captain Mahesh Bhupathi was part of the team, which also had Leander Paes, Prakash Amritraj and Rohan Bopanna who is still part of India's plans. Bopanna with doubles partner Divij Sharan won the only rubber against Italy.

"It's a good draw for us. We would like to believe we are the stronger side. Prajnesh is doing well in the ATP challenges and Yuki (Bhambri) is recovering from injury. Ramkumar Ramanathan is expected to continue his surge. We will have three players inside top 150, which has not happened in the Indian tennis for a long time," India coach Zee-shan Ali told IANS.

Ali did not comment on the team's Pakistan travel plan, saying they have no problem in playing anywhere and on any surface as long as they get the green signal.

England defence coach Mitchell warns against complacency

England's Six Nations win over champions Ireland was a step in the right direction but they must continue to improve if they are to have any chance of World Cup success this year, defence coach John Mitchell has said.

England, who earned high praise for their 32-20 win in Dublin, next face a France side still smarting from defeat to Wales in their opener and Mitchell said they had to be wary.

"We have to back up our performances before we can talk about any World Cup... we just have to get better," he told British media.

"We have to keep our eyes on

the road, because when you take your eyes off the road other things can happen. It's a challenge at the weekend and we have to prove to ourselves that we can be consistent."

England made 181 tackles and won despite having less possession than Ireland, and Mitchell said their defensive solidity was a platform for the team going forward.

"It's infectious when you get it right," Mitchell added. "Defence reveals how much the team means to you and how much those around you mean to you - how much you care about them. It's not just the tackle, it's what the pressure creates."

TENNIS

Shapovalov shines on serve

Agencies
Paris

Denis Shapovalov got his campaign at the Open Sud de France off to a good start yesterday, defeating Spaniard Marcel Granollers 6-4, 7-6(1) to advance to the quarter-finals.

"Today was a really good match," said Montpellier debutant Shapovalov on court after the match. "I think we were both serving well. It was tough to get a rhythm, but I'm very happy how I managed to play at the end."

The #NextGenATP Canadian did not face break point and won 30 of 33 first-serve points in his one-hour, 22-minute victory. Once in rallies, Shapovalov had the match on his racket, and his heavier weight of shot proved decisive on the big points.

TOP SEED KHACHANOV SUFFERS EARLY EXIT IN SOFIA
Russian top seed Karen Khachanov suffered a shock 6-7(6) 6-3 6-4 defeat by unheralded Italian Matteo Berrettini in the second round of the Sofia Open on Wednesday. The 22-year-old Khachanov was in devastating form at the start as he dropped only two points in his first four service games.

After bagging the first set tie-break, he then unexpectedly lost



Canada's Denis Shapovalov returns the ball to Spain's Marcel Granollers during their round match at the Open Sud de France ATP World Tour in Montpellier, southern France, yesterday. (AFP)

his way. The 53rd-ranked Berrettini fired down nine aces en route to booking a place in the quarter-finals.

"It was a very difficult first set, I didn't play so well," said Berrettini. "But then I improved my performance in the second set and I think I played very well in the third."

Sixth seed Fernando Verdasco set up a second-round showdown with Romanian Marius Copil, who outclassed Swiss Stan Wawrinka in the opening round. Verdasco secured a comfortable 6-2 6-1 victory over Bulgarian qualifier Alexander Lazarov.

"I played very well today, very

solid," the 35-year-old Verdasco said. Fourth seed Roberto Bautista Agut, who won the tournament in 2016, came back from a set down to beat Australian Matthew Ebden 3-6 6-3 6-2 in the last 16, while Hungarian Marton Fucsovics upset Italian eighth seed Andreas Seppi 6-2 7-6(2) in a first round tussle.

Defending champion Mirza Basic was beaten by Slovakian big-hitter Martin Klizan in another first-round match. World number 38 Klizan clinched a 6-0 3-6 6-2 victory over the 27-year-old Bosnian, who lifted the trophy in Armeets Arena last year as a qualifier, winning seven matches in a week.

CYCLING

Trentin claims first win of the season

AFP
Valencia

Italy's Matteo Trentin timed his sprint to perfection to claim victory in the second stage of the Tour of Valencia yesterday.

Trentin of Mitchelton-Scott pulled away from Nacer Bouhanni of Cofidis and Ben Swift of Team Sky to clinch his first victory of the season while Norway's Edvald Boasson Hagen finished fifth to retain the overall lead.

After 166 kilometres, starting in Alicante and finishing back in the centre of the city, Trentin had crossed the line in 4hrs 10min 12sec.

Boasson Hagen of Dimension Data holds a five-second lead over Spain's Ion Izagirre in second.

Trentin's crucial moment came on a right-hand turn just before the finishing straight, which the European champion navigated brilliantly to come out in front of Bouhanni, who had no time to recover.

Earlier, Dylan Groenewegen had been dropped on the final categorised climb of Alto de Carrasqueta but the Dutchman's Jumbo-Visma teammates hustled him back into

contention with 15km to go.

Team Sky also pushed a cluster of riders to the front, with Swift well-placed until Trentin made the decisive move. Swift was still comfortably clear of another Italian, Sonny Colbrelli of Bahrain-Merida, in fourth.

The race continues today with a 191-kilometre third stage between Quart de Poblet and Chera.

Earlier Geraint Thomas has confirmed he will miss the Giro d'Italia to be "in the best shape possible" for the defence of his Tour de France crown. Last year Thomas, 32, followed in the footsteps of Team Sky teammate Chris Froome and Bradley Wiggins, becoming the third Briton to win the Tour.

"The Giro feels like unfinished business and I wanted to think about that," Thomas was quoted as saying by the BBC.

"Maybe I'll race it next year but this year has always been about the Tour," added the Welshman, who was forced to withdraw injured from the 2017 Giro.

Last month Thomas, who began his season in the Tour of Valencia on Wednesday, said the Tour de France was his key objective for 2019.

FOCUS

Gayle returns to WI squad for England ODIs

AFP
Gros Islet, Saint Lucia

West Indies recalled veteran batsman Chris Gayle yesterday for the first two one-day internationals against England in preparation for this year's World Cup.

The hard-hitting, 39-year-old Gayle last played for West Indies during a home series against Bangladesh last July, and could renew an explosive opening partnership alongside Evin Lewis.

Lewis and Gayle both missed the recent ODI series in India and Bangladesh but have been included as part of a 14-man squad that saw left-handed batsman Nicholas Pooran called up for the first time.

West Indies and England will contest five one-dayers following the conclusion of the Test series, in which the hosts hold an unassailable 2-0 lead ahead of the finale in St Lucia on Saturday.

"As we continue our Cricket World Cup preparations, the upcoming series against the top ranked ODI side is a great opportunity for us to gauge where we are as a team," said West Indies chairman of selectors Courtney Browne.

"This allows us to identify any areas that need addressing relating to selection and also helps the coaching staff to fine tune their game strategy."

Gayle holds the West Indian record for most ODI hundreds with 23, and is their second-leading runscore in the 50-over format with 9,727 runs – trail-



ing only Brian Lara (10,405). His 215 against Zimbabwe in the 2015 World Cup also represents the highest limited-overs score by a West Indies batsman. "We welcome the return of Chris Gayle who missed the last two series and Ashley Nurse from injury. We are pleased to introduce Nicholas Pooran

to the ODI cricket for the first time," said Browne.

"He is clearly a young player with undoubted talent and we believe he can add value to our middle order."

Browne said fast bowler Shannon Gabriel would be considered for later in the series, although experienced batsman

Marlon Samuels is unavailable due to a knee injury.

SQUAD: Jason Holder (captain), Fabian Allen, Devendra Bishoo, Darren Bravo, Chris Gayle, Shimron Hetmyer, Shai Hope, Evin Lewis, Ashley Nurse, Keemo Paul, Nicholas Pooran, Rovman Powell, Kemar Roach, Oshane Thomas

FIXTURES

- 1st ODI – February 20, Bridgetown
- 2nd ODI – February 22, Bridgetown
- 3rd ODI – February 25, St George's
- 4th ODI – February 27, St George's
- 5th ODI – March 2, Gros Islet

SETBACK

Starc ruled out of India ODI series

Scans have revealed he sustained a substantial tear to his left pec muscle

Reuters
Melbourne

Australia fast bowler Mitchell Starc has been ruled out of the one-day international series in India after sustaining a pectoral muscle injury during the second Test win over Sri Lanka, Cricket Australia said yesterday.

Kane Richardson will take his place in the 15-man squad for the tour starting later this month.

"Unfortunately, scans have revealed that Mitchell Starc sustained a substantial tear to his left pec muscle while bowling on the final day of the Test match in Canberra," selector Trevor Hohns said in a statement.

"This means he will be unavailable for the tour of India, but we will instead target a return to play for the ODI series against Pakistan in the UAE in March."

Western Australia opening batsman D'Arcy Short has been included in the squad as cover for Shaun Marsh, who is recovering from a hamstring strain and not expected to feature until the third ODI.

SQUAD: Aaron Finch (captain), Usman Khawaja, Shaun Marsh, Peter Handscomb, Glenn



Australia's Mitchell Starc bowls during the second Test against Sri Lanka in Canberra on Monday. (AFP)

Maxwell, Ashton Turner, Marcus Stoinis, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins, Nathan Coulter-Nile, Jhye Richardson, Kane Richardson, Jason Behrendorff, Nathan Lyon, Adam Zampa, D'Arcy Short.

AUSTRALIA BOWLING COACH SAKER RESIGNS

Australia bowling coach David Saker has resigned less than three months before the team's World

Cup title defence in England.

Governing body Cricket Australia said Saker, who succeeded Craig McDermott in 2016, had resigned "effective immediately" and would be replaced by Troy Cooley for upcoming one-day international series against India and Pakistan.

While Australia completed a dominant 2-0 Test series win over Sri Lanka earlier this week,

the team's bowlers have been under fire during a disappointing home summer.

They were upstaged by India's potent seamers in a 2-1 Test series loss to Virat Kohli's team, Australia's first defeat to an Asian side on home pitches.

Head coach Justin Langer said he and Saker had been talking about his position for several months.

"David and I have had ongoing discussions over the past nine months about his role with the team, and we agreed it's the right time to head in a different direction in the best interests of the team," Langer said in a statement yesterday.

Saker took the unusual step of publicly criticising his bowlers in the fourth and final Test against India in Sydney last month, revealing discord with staff over tactics.

He finishes with a mixed record, having helped Australia to big Test series wins at home to Pakistan (2016/17) and England (2017/18) but also having overseen demoralising home defeats to South Africa (2016/17) and India recently.

Saker said he had enjoyed "working closely with a great group of fast bowlers" and would look forward to a new coaching role.

The 52-year-old enjoyed his greatest international successes in charge of England's bowling, helping Andrew Strauss's side to a breakthrough Ashes win in Australia in 2010/11 and Alastair Cook's team to a rare Test series win in India in 2012/13.

CA said it would confirm the coaching set-up before the World Cup starts in England at the end of May.

Qatar's Abdulrahman al-Mannai elected member of FIM Corporate Governance Committee



The International Motorcycling Federation (FIM) announced the election of Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) president **Abdulrahman al-Mannai** a member of the international federation's Governance Committee. The members of the Governance Committee, which includes five members of the most prominent heads of federations globally, are voted for by the members of the FIM Board. Al-Mannai's election is an asset for the State of Qatar in general and for Qatari sports in particular, as he will be an active member of the committee concerned with the evaluation and monitoring of the performance of the International Federation and the development of future plans and policies. The Governance Committee is scheduled to hold its first meeting in mid-February at the federation headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

Qatar's Rashid Nawaf secures second place in Le Petit AS Tennis Tournament in France

Qatar's promising young tennis player Rashid Nawaf secured the second place in the French Le Petit AS Tennis Tournament held in France in cooperation with the European Tennis Federation and the International Tennis Federation (ITF). Le Petit AS have attracted some of the top stars in the world in the past who have also lifted the title, including Spain's Rafael Nadal, Swiss Martina Hingis and Belgium's Kim Clijsters. The tournament witnessed the participation of 64 players in the main rounds of individual boys from all over the world, where about 7,000 tennis players participated in the pre-qualifying rounds and then only 350 qualified for the final stage. On the same level, Qatari player Rashid Nawaf secured ninth place in the European rankings after his successful participation in Le Petit AS tournament. Nawaf will start his first tour of the International Tennis Federation (ITF) for the first time in March in Doha with the aim of winning his first spot in ITF category and he intends to participate in the U-14 World Championship qualifiers.

SPOTLIGHT

Leach tells England to improve, not complain about pitches

Reuters
London

England must prepare their batsmen to handle different types of pitches and not just complain about unfamiliar tracks if they are to be more consistent overseas, spinner Jack Leach has said.

England suffered a 10-wicket defeat to the West Indies in the second Test last week as their batsmen struggled to cope with the variable bounce on a green Antigua wicket, managing scores of 187 and 132 in two innings.

That display followed another batting failure in the first Test at Barbados, where the tourists were bundled out for 77 and 246 to lose by 381 runs on a flat wicket.

"We need to challenge people to be better at cricket rather than complain about pitches," left-arm spinner Leach, who missed

the first two Tests, told British media. "We need players to experience different surfaces."

"I don't know if that comes from the top or the counties, but it's a big thing. There are very few times where you spend 150 overs in the field and it's a batting paradise."

Leach, who has honed his skills on a Taunton pitch that offers turn, picked up 18 wickets as England completed a 3-0 sweep at Sri Lanka last November.

However, the 27-year-old said England had a tendency to view spinning wickets negatively.

"But if it's seaming around we're not too bothered. That needs to be addressed, how they mark pitches," he added.

"So as much as I think spinning pitches are important, playing on flat ones, too. You can't do things you haven't practised before."

The third Test begins in St Lucia tomorrow.

Sarwate inspires Vidarbha to second straight Ranji title

IAN S
Nagpur, India

Left-arm spinner Aditya Sarwate starred with the ball to help defending champions Vidarbha retain their Ranji Trophy title by thrashing Saurashtra by 78 runs in the summit clash at the VCA Stadium here yesterday.

Chasing a target of 206, Saurashtra folded up for 127, with Sarwate emerging the wrecking-in-chief, bagging six wickets in his 24 overs in the second innings. He had picked up 5 for 98 in the first innings.

Needing five wickets on the final day to clinch the title second time in a row, Sarwate, who finished with six wickets in the final innings, guided his team to the domestic title.

The left-arter emerged the hero of the 85th Ranji title clash after he scalped 11 wickets and scored 49 vital runs but more importantly negated the threat of India Test star Cheteshwar Pujara, dismissing him in both the innings. Off-spinner Akshay Wakhare

provided the perfect support, claiming seven wickets in the match.

Vidarbha started the day on a positive note as, in the second over of the day, Sarwate dismissed Kamlesh Makvana (14) who along with Vishvaraj Jadeja forged a 33-run stand for the sixth wicket.

Wakhare then dismissed Prerak Mankad (2) in the very next over and kept the pressure on with his tight line and length. Needing 115 runs more with three wickets remaining, Dharmendrasinh Jadeja (17 runs in 56 balls) supported Vishvaraj Jadeja (52 runs in 137 balls) handsomely but Sarwate again came into the picture and picked up the set batsman.

Vishvaraj was adjudged leg before wicket. After that, no other lower-order batsmen fought as skipper Jaydev Anadkat (7) then got dismissed and after couple of overs, Jadeja was sent packing by Wakhare.

With this result, Saurashtra have now lost all the three Ranji Trophy summit clashes that they have played so far.

Smith surgery goes 'very well', on track for World Cup

AFP
Sydney

Former Australia cricket captain Steve Smith's surgery for an elbow injury went "very well" and he remains on track for the World Cup in England, his management said.

Smith, whose one-year ban for ball-tampering expires in late March, was forced to drop out of the Bangladesh Premier League Twenty20 tournament last month with the ligament problem.

He went under the knife and is currently in a brace.



Smith's manager Warren Craig told the Cricket Australia website late Wednesday the surgery had "gone very well". "Until the brace comes off we don't know for sure but all cur-

rent opinion is that he'll then have about three-and-a-half weeks (before being ready to play)," he said. "The intent is that he will play in the IPL (Indian Premier

League) and then the World Cup and then the Ashes." His comments appeared to rubbish reports this week that Smith may miss the one-day World Cup and return to cricket through the Australia A tour of England that coincides with the showpiece tournament that begins in late May.

Smith and David Warner become eligible for international selection again on March 29 after serving year-long bans for their part in attempting to alter the ball during a Test against South Africa.

Warner also returned home from Bangladesh to have an injured elbow assessed, but it

is not believed to be as serious as Smith's. He was due to undergo minor surgery in late January.

Australian Test skipper Tim Paine on Monday said he expected both of them to play "a huge" role in this year's Ashes series against England. Without the experienced pair, Australia have struggled, although they ended their summer on a high with a 2-0 series win over Sri Lanka.

"We know how good they are and hopefully once their bans are up they'll be welcomed back and they will win Test matches like they did before," said Paine.

HORSE RACING

Pedroza, Topsy Turvy shine in Al Wajba Cup

Trainers Ghazali and De Mieulle saddle two winners each

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Ibrahim al-Malki-trained Topsy Turvy had finished behind rival Third Dimension on his first two outings this season. But yesterday, Sheikh Faisal bin Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani's gelding made amends in the Al Wajba Cup, yesterday's feature for Thoroughbreds on dirt.

In the 1900m race, Eduardo Pedroza helmed the seven-year-old to a fine one-and-a-half length victory ahead of Hadi Nasser al-Ramzani's Vitally Important, while Jassim Mohamed Ghazali-schooled Third Dimension had to settle for fourth, quarter of a length behind third-placed Shakour, also saddled by Ghazali.

Ghazali, however, had two winners on the day, and so did Alban de Mieulle.

Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari's Attaf in the Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate was the first winner on the day for the champion trainer, while Sheail bin Khalifa al-Kuwari's Gangland topped the Thoroughbred Handicap event for horses rated 80 and below.

Alban de Mieulle's ward Aafreen opened the day with a victory in the Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate under Ronan Thomas, while Mathieu Pelletan helmed Umm Qarn's Dabaab in the only Purebred Arabian race of the day – Purebred Arabian Graduation Plate.

Jockeys Theo Bachelot and Thomas too had two winners on the day. Besides Aafreen, Thomas was in the saddle for Mohamed Riyaz-trained Al Migdam, who topped the Thoroughbred Maiden Plate.

Bachelot helmed Gangland, and Bader al-Balushi-trained Nayer Bu Thaila in the Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate event.

JP Guillambert guided Mohamed Jassim Ghazali-trained Noble Masterpiece to the gelding first victory in Qatar – Thoroughbred Novice Plate.

After a difficult season, Al Mugheerat Stud's Shadow Game registered his fourth career victory, when Al Moatsem al-Balushi rode the colt to a close victory in the Thoroughbred Handicap event for horses rated 70 and below.

RESULTS

Race 1: 1. Aafreen (Ronan Thomas), 2. Hilala (Marco Casa-



Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club Racing manager Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi with the winners of the Al Wajba Cup after Topsy Turvy won the feature on dirt yesterday. PICTURES: Juhaime



Eduardo Pedroza rides Topsy Turvy to victory in the Al Wajba Cup yesterday.

mento), 3. Mama Samia (Anas al-Seyabi), 4. Rosasa (Eduardo Pedroza). Won by: 14, 2, 5 ¼. Time: 1:15.42. Owner: Umm Qarn. Trainer: Alban de Mieulle.

Race 2: 1. Nayer Bu Thaila (Theo Bachelot), 2. Sarat Abha (Tomas Lukasek), 3. Mallhogg (Ivan Rossi), 4. Lamyaa (Jean Baptiste Hamel). Won by: 1 ¼, 5, ¼. Time: 1:13.71.

Owner: Rashid Mohamed al-Athba. Trainer: Bader al-Balushi. **Race 3:** 1. Attaf (Marco Casamento), 2. Jafra Bu Thaila (Yousef al-Hajri), 3. Sharifa Bu Thaila (Gerald Avranché), 4. Black Forest (Abdulla Hozam al-Marri). Won by: 6, ¼, Hd. Time: 1:14.63. Owner: Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari. Trainer: Jassim Mohamed Ghazali.

Race 4: 1. Al Migdam (Ronan Thomas), 2. Hard Forest (Marco

Casamento), 3. Suprematism (Tomas Lukasek), 4. Modharafah (JP Guillambert). Won by: 4, ¾, 2 ¾. Time: 1:49.77. Owner: Meshaal bin Ali al-Attayah. Trainer: Mohamed Riyaz.

Race 5: 1. Noble Masterpiece (JP Guillambert), 2. Beach Samba (Ivan Rossi), 3. Acclaimed Dancer (Adnan Hawa), 4. High Horse (Marco Casamento). Won by: 4 ¼, 2 ¼, 6 ¼. Time: 1:11.45. Owner: Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari. Trainer: Mohamed Jassim Ghazali.

Race 6: 1. Dabaab (Mathieu Pelletan), 2. Melk (JP Guillambert), 3. Jabal Aramoon (Gerald Avranché), 4. Baker De Saularie (Stephan Ladjadj). Won by: 6 ¼, ¾, 2 ¾. Time: 1:58.99. Owner: Umm Qarn. Trainer: Alban de Mieulle.

Race 7: 1. Shadow Game (Al Moat-

asem al-Balushi), 2. Lo De Nalane (JP Guillambert), 3. Eledeed (Jean Baptiste Hamel), 4. Al Mikdam (Gerald Avranché). Won by: ¾, 1 ¾, 3 ½. Time: 1:49.97. Owner: Al Mugheerat Stud. Trainer: Wasim Al Sahn.

Race 8: 1. Gangland (Theo Bachelot), 2. Al Gomry (Marco Casamento), 3. Intenser (Anas al-Seyabi), 4. Crisscrossed (Ronan Thomas). Won by: 3, 3 ¼, Shd. Time: 1:11.60. Owner: Sheail bin Khalifa al-Kuwari. Trainer: Jassim Mohamed Ghazali.

Race 9: 1. Topsy Turvy (Eduardo Pedroza), 2. Vitally Important (Ronan Thomas), 3. Shakour (JP Guillambert), 4. Third Dimension (Stephan Ladjadj). Won by: 1 ½, ½, ¼. Time: 2:01.68. Owner: Sheikh Faisal bin Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani. Trainer: Ibrahim al-Malki.

FOOTBALL / ALKASS INTERNATIONAL CUP

Former champions Real Madrid snatch a draw from Suwon

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Former winners Real Madrid came from behind to snatch a draw against South Koreans Suwon Samsung in a game of two penalties.

Yong Joon Cho put Suwon ahead on 71 minutes but the Koreans' hopes of victory were dashed when the impressive Pau Aran levelled in the closing stages.

The Spaniards controlled the first half but created few chances as the South Koreans got everyone behind the ball and made it difficult for Real to find a route to goal.

The introduction of Aran, who starred in Real's 3-2 victory over Spartak Moscow earlier in the campaign, for the second half sparked more creativity from the Spanish side. Aran and Peter Carmona went close with two efforts apiece as the favourites stepped up a gear and it seemed a matter of time before Real took the lead.

But the Koreans stunned the Spaniards when taking the lead with a harshly-awarded penalty. Intaek Hwang went down but Rafael Zamora appeared to have played the ball and could not believe a penalty had been awarded, and Cho made no mistake with a perfect spot-kick.

Talented Icelandic youngster Andi Gudjohnsen – the son of former Chelsea and Barcelona star Eidur – and Victor Gordo went close with headers as Real tried to find an equaliser and they appealed for a penalty after Carmona and keeper Kim collided when going for a high ball, which led to the Spaniard being taken off with a cut to his head.

As Real pushed forward, the Koreans made a dangerous counter attack that saw Hojoon Lee through on goal but Miguel Ramon did well to get back to make a crucial tackle.

Real finally drew level on 90 minutes after Zamora was brought down. Initially a free-kick was awarded but VAR intervened and the decision was changed to a penalty. Aran stepped up to score his second goal of the tournament, beating the outstretched hand of Kim from the resultant spot kick.

With seven minutes added on, following the delay caused by Carmona's injury, Real tried to find a winner but despite the influence of player of the match Gudjohnsen they had to settle for point.

ALTINORDU OVERCOME ESS Tournament debutants Altinordu claimed a deserved 1-0 victory at the death against Etoile Sportive du Sahel, who showed limited ambition for



Action from the match between Suwon Samsung (in blue) and Real Madrid (in black) in the Alkass International Cup yesterday.

much of the game. However, the match was perhaps most notable for the controversial application of VAR technology, which saw a goal ruled out for either side.

In the opening stages of this match, Altinordu more than held their own, their neat interplay frequently leaving the Turks chasing lengthening shadows as the sun set over Aspire Academy.

For much of the first half ESS were pinned back, with the Turks enjoying the vast majority of possession. Even so, they seemed in no hurry to test Tunisian keeper Hassen Fradj, content instead to stroke the ball around and await an opportunity, which duly arrived on 40 minutes.

There seemed little danger when Alihan Senturk picked up the ball midway inside the ESS half on the left, but the skilful forward set off on a slaloming run, easily beating two defenders before striking low and hard into the far corner. The watch-

ing Turkish fans were delirious, but their joy was short-lived following the intervention of VAR technicians, who had spotted a foul in the centre circle in the build-up to the goal.

Altinordu were on the ropes and, with five minutes left, substitute Makram Krifa had the ball in the net for ESS, only for VAR to once again intervene and grant the Turks a reprieve, with the 'goal' ruled out for the most marginal of offsides.

Two minutes later, Altinordu took full advantage of their good fortune, as substitute Enis Destan rose to meet a looping cross and head home the winner. On balance, it was no more than the Izmir side deserved for an accomplished display that oozed class, while lacking a cutting edge at times. Next they face Bayern, in a match that the Germans must win to have any chance of advancing past the group stage. If today's game is anything to go by, the Munich titans will have their work cut out.

28th Qatar International Arabian Horse Show



Winners on Day One of the 28th Qatar International Arabian Horse Show pose with their respective trophies at Souq Waqif yesterday. Some of the winners on the first day of the competition include Shaqab's Ramtha Al Shaqab (Class 2 for two-year-old fillies) and Te Al Shaqab (Class 1B for Yearling fillies), and Al Nasser Stud's Munefa Al Nasser (Class 1A for Yearling fillies).

