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**Bucks bounce back from losses to punish Pacers**

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Saturday, March 9, 2019  
Rajab 2, 1440 AH

# GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

**Khawaja, bowlers help Australia outplay India**

Page 3

COMMERCIAL BANK QATAR MASTERS

# Coetzee shares three-way lead at halfway mark

South African cards 68 to lead with compatriot Harding and France's Lorenzo-Vera

By Yash Mudgal  
Doha

South African George Coetzee is blooming again at Doha Golf Club as he fired his second straight four-under round of 68 at the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters yesterday.

Coetzee rode his momentum into a relatively calmer day two, firing three birdies on the front nine, and another one on the par five 10th, before keeping the slate clean on the rest of the holes.

"I'm happy to be playing some better golf, making some putts and hitting some good shots," said Coetzee, who has scored four top-ten finishes in the Qatar Masters.

The South African was making his seventh consecutive appearance at the event having finished second in 2013.

The 32-year-old golfer has missed his last two cuts on the European Tour.

"I'm in a better place mentally. I played well in parts in the WGC-Mexico Championship and hit some good shots in Oman last week - mixed in with a couple of blunders - but I feel like things are falling into place this week."

All four of Coetzee's European Tour wins so far have come in Africa but he has found himself a happy hunting ground in the Middle East as he looks for win number five.

Coetzee reached a career-high 41st in the world after finishing second in Qatar in 2013, but started this week ranked 243rd after just one top-20 finish in his last 25 events.

"I feel like everything is slowly getting into place. I don't know when it's going to be there for four rounds but hopefully I'll be awake and ready to reap the rewards," he said.

South Africa has been the most successful nation in the history of this event, claiming five wins out of 21 stagings and Justin Harding was alongside countryman Coetzee and France's Mike Lorenzo-Vera at eight-under after round two.

The 33-year-old Harding sound satisfied with his performance.

"I'm very happy," said Harding. "It was a tough day starting out but the wind settled down a bit later on. I hit some good shots and could have holed a couple more putts but I'm happy to put myself in this position after two days and we'll see what happens."

Earlier, Lorenzo-Vera took advantage of moderate morning conditions to set the clubhouse target with a second successive 68, mixing five birdies with a sole blemish.

"Today, I had a lack of energy in the middle of the round. I had



South Africa's George Coetzee in action during the second round of the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters yesterday. PICTURES: Jayaram



South Africa's Justin Harding plays a chip shot during the second round at the Doha Golf Club yesterday.

a three-putt from eight metres for an eagle on the 18th, and then made a bogey on the first after a poor tee shot and an even worse lay-up," said Lorenzo-Vera, who is looking for his first European Tour win following some near-misses in recent years.

He suffered a mid-round stutter before bouncing back with birdies on both the par-3s on the front nine but handled it well to make a comeback.

"I'm happy with how I handled it and played my way back into the round."

"It was nice at the beginning. We were downwind on the 10th, so had a short second shot into the green which were really good - very grainy, but still very fair. It was a bit harder in the middle of the round. It was a really early wake-up call and I lost a bit of focus, but that was the only difference compared to yesterday," the Frenchman said.

Another South African, 2003 champion Darren Fichardt, also had his share of limelight yesterday as he carded an impressive eight-under, the lowest score of the day.

England's Oliver Wilson, who has lost his European Tour card twice before, was hoping to take full advantage of his opportunity with a 68 yesterday following a 69 on Thursday to sit alongside three other players on 7-under-par.

"I'm very pleased and to be bogey-free for two days is something I'm delighted with," said Wilson, who won twice on the Challenge Tour last year. "I have experience around this course, which helps, and I've been playing solid, hitting a lot of fairways and finding the middle of the greens."

"Last week, I got one step closer to getting into the field for the Qatar Masters each day.

I'd already booked my flights to Doha so I was prepared and to get the nod after my final round was great. It's hard not to put pressure on yourself. It's a different position when you can plan a schedule and you know you have 25 or 30 events, you can be a bit more patient - but I don't have that, I don't know how many events I'm going to get in.

"I'm just trying to improve. I'm really pleased with what I've done in the last year, I'm moving in the right direction and getting more confidence in my game. There's still a long way to go but, hopefully, the results will come and at the end of the year I can look back, be pleased, and have a schedule for next year."

Wilson is joined by South Africa's Erik Van Rooyen, Japan's Masahiro Kawamura and Spaniard Adri Arnaus one stroke adrift the leaders while a group

of eight players are on 6-under-par including Scotland's Richie Ramsay, Belgian Nicolas Colsaerts and Australia's Deyen Lawson, who made his second hole-in-one of the season at the 17th. The first one came at the Alfred Dunhill Championship in December.

## LEADING SECOND ROUND SCORES

**136:** George Coetzee (South Africa) 68-68, Justin Harding (South Africa) 68-68, Mike Lorenzo-Vera (France) 68-68

**137:** Adri Arnaus (Spain) 67-70, Masahiro Kawamura (Japan) 69-68, Erik Van Rooyen (South Africa) 69-68, Oliver Wilson (England) 69-68

**138:** Kristoffer Broberg (Sweden) 71-67, Nicolas Colsaerts (Belgium) 68-70, Thomas Detry (Belgium) 70-68, Nacho Elvira (Spain) 71-67, Anton Karlsson (Sweden) 72-66, Jacques Kruysswijk (South Africa) 71-67, Deyen Lawson (Australia) 70-68, Richie Ramsay (Scotland) 68-70

**139:** Alejandro Canizares (Spain) 71-68, Nick Cullen (Australia) 69-70, Bradley Dredge (Wales) 68-71, Kurt Kitayama (USA) 69-70, Jordan Smith (England) 71-68, Paul Waring (England) 69-70

**140:** Thomas Aiken (South Africa) 71-69, Gaganjeet Bhullar (India) 69-71, Ashley Chesters (England) 70-70, Jens Dantorp (Sweden) 72-68, Darren Fichardt (South Africa) 76-64, Oliver Fisher (England) 73-67, Gavin Green (Malaysia) 71-69, Maximilian Kieffer (Germany) 69-71, Hugo Leon (Chile) 68-72, Yusaku Miyazato (Japan) 69-71, Sebastian Soderberg (Sweden) 72-68, Justin Walters (South Africa) 67-73, Jeff Winther (Denmark) 70-70, Fabrizio Zanotti (Paraguay) 72-68

MOTORSPORT

# Qatar's Abdulla takes T3 lead after first day in Dubai



Qatar's Adel Abdulla in action yesterday.

Agencies  
Dubai

Qatar's Adel Abdulla and French co-driver Jean-Michel Polato began their challenge for honours at the Dubai International Baja with the quickest time in the T3 category yesterday.

The day's selective section of 201.60km wound its way through Dubai's Al-Qudra desert, taking in fast sandy tracks, some small dunes and rocky terrain.

Abdulla's switch to a Can-Am Maverick X3 this season is seen as a new challenge for the former FIA T2 world champion, who had built up a lead of 4min 59sec at the overnight halt over Emirati driver Michel Fadel, despite a down-on-power engine.

Six entrants are taking part in T3 at this second round of the FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Bajas. Abdulla is using a car being managed on events by the Spanish FN Speed Team with support from Ooredoo and the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF).

Abdulla said: "We are in the first position but we had some technical problems. I can see that the light of the engine was on from the start of the stage. The power was not so good. Maybe 80 percent of the power was there. I think maybe something electrical. I didn't have the

big top speed, maybe 105km/h maximum, but we did a good job under the circumstances.

"We stopped one time to reset everything because we thought there was something wrong with the computer. Anyway we are happy about the result today. Tomorrow is a long day and I hope we can find the problem and push on."

Series T3 rivals Abdullah al-Zubair of Oman and Italy's Michele Cinotto were third and fourth overall and Spain's Santiago Navarro and Russian driver Fedor Vorobyev rounded off the top six.

Today, the event draws to a close with a slightly longer desert selective section of 204.93km before the return to the Dubai Autodrome for the ceremonial finish.

## T3 POSITIONS AFTER SS1

1. Adel Abdulla (QAT)/Jean-Michel Polato (FRA) Can-Am Maverick X3 3hrs 14min 02sec
2. Michel Fadel (ARE)/Craig Tyson (ARE) Polaris XP 1000 3hrs 19min 01sec
3. Abdullah al-Zubair (OMN)/Nasser al-Kuwari (QAT) Can-Am Maverick X3 3hrs 29min 52sec
4. Michele Cinotto (ITA)/Mauricio Dominella (ITA) Polaris RZR 1000 3hrs 33min 11sec
5. Santiago Navarro (ESP)/Pedro Lopez (ESP) Can-Am Maverick X3 3hrs 33min 39sec
6. Fedor Vorobyev (RUS)/Kirill Shubin (RUS) Can-Am Maverick X3 3hrs 39min 39sec

## Neymar heads to Qatar for medical assessment



Neymar will travel to Qatar to undergo a "complete assessment" six weeks into his recovery from a fractured right foot, Paris Saint-Germain said on Thursday.

The Brazil forward watched on forlornly from the stands at the Parc des Princes as PSG crashed out of the Champions League last 16 on Wednesday

to Manchester United on away goals following a 3-1 defeat. "Neymar Jr will travel to Aspetar (sports clinic) in Qatar for the next 3 days as scheduled in the initial recovery plan," the club wrote on its Twitter account. "He will undertake a complete assessment after six weeks of his injury. He will be accompanied by a medical team from PSG."

The 27-year-old damaged the fifth metatarsal in his right foot in a French Cup win over Strasbourg on January 23 and was ruled out for 10 weeks. PSG were hoping he would be healed enough to get back on the pitch in time for a potential Champions League quarter-final in April, but the French side suffered an exit as United sensationally overturned a 2-0 first-leg deficit.

GOLF / COMMERCIAL BANK QATAR MASTERS

# Fichardt's eight-under round puts former winner back in spotlight

By Yash Mudgal  
Doha

Former champion from South Africa Darren Fichardt had his share of limelight yesterday as he shot a superb eight-under par, the lowest score of the day, in the second round of the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters.

The 44-year-old, who had only four top-ten finishes last year and finished tied 40th in last week's Oman Open, produced eight spectacular birdies in the morning session at the Doha Golf Club to finish the day tied 22nd at four-under.

"Today I found something on the greens before I teed off and I



South Africa's Darren Fichardt. (Twitter/Darrenfichardt1)

managed to make a nice putt for birdie on the first hole and the third hole, and just carried on and it all started getting bigger and bigger," said Fichardt, who had back-to-back birdies twice

— on fifth-sixth and 13th-14th holes.

Talking about his poor first round on Thursday where he carded a four-over with five bogeys, the five-time winner on the European Tour said, "Yesterday, I hit the ball really well. But I putted horrendously. I was very disappointed on the greens."

"I wasn't releasing. I was trying to hit out on it to start the ball rolling sooner, but I was hitting it down into the grain and it was jumping all over the place."

Remembering his 2003 victory here at the Doha Golf Club, he said: "The guys here have been giving me a lot of uphill this week, saying how much hair I had. I can't believe it's been 16 years since I last lifted the trophy here. Time has certainly flown."

India's Gaganjeet Bhullar, who is also in the Fichardt bunch, was a bit disappointed with his one-under second round. Bhullar made a fine start in difficult conditions with a three-under 69 after the first round.

"I hit the ball really well today... I think I hit better than yesterday. But I missed a lot of putts today. Though I managed to finish the day with a birdie and hope to keep the momentum till Sunday," the 30-year-old, who won his maiden European Tour title in Fiji last August, said.

However, the only other Indian in the fray, four-time European Tour winner SSP Chowrasia's wretched run continued as he failed to make the cut.

SPOTLIGHT

# Cabrera Bello avoids water to set pace with 65 at Bay Hill



Reuters  
Cary, North Carolina

Rafa Cabrera Bello proved a quick learner in his first appearance at Bay Hill, taking the first-round lead with a seven-under-par 65 at the Arnold Palmer Invitational in Florida on Thursday.

The Spaniard avoided trouble on the many water-lined holes to head American Keegan Bradley by two strokes, while 1997 champion Phil Mickelson was among a group three off the pace in Orlando.

Mickelson's round of 68 included a double-bogey at the par-four 10th, where 'Lefty' tried rather ambitiously to hit a right-handed recovery shot only for his ball to get caught up in a mesh fence.

Justin Rose shot 71, one better than defending champion Rory McIlroy, whose birdie putt at the last cruelly lipped out of the hole.

Ninety-four balls ended in the water, the most in any round at Bay Hill since 2003, but Cabrera Bello steered clear of trouble and was four-under after six holes.

"I really didn't know what to expect," he told reporters.

"To be fair I've been playing good this year. I got off to a nice early hot start, hung in there, didn't give myself much chances of trouble."

"A couple of lucky breaks, a couple of good putts and when I look at the leaderboard, seven-under looks nice."

The highlight of Cabrera Bello's round was a near ace at the 215-yard second hole — his 11th

— where his three-iron landed on the front of the green and curled deliciously with the slope towards the hole, before stopping just short.

"I had come off a bogey at one, so wasn't really happy on the (second) tee," he said. "I hit it exactly how I wanted. I knew it was a good shot... and then I looked up and see it a foot away."

World number 34 Cabrera Bello, a three-times winner on the European Tour, is seeking his first victory on the PGA Tour.

World number two Rose was not too displeased with his performance in his first round after a month off.

"Bay Hill played quite tricky this morning, quite cool starting out and just enough breeze to make every shot challenging," said the Englishman.

McIlroy also remained positive.

"I'm three shots off the top 10. If tomorrow I shoot something in the 60s I'll be right there for the weekend," said the Northern Irishman, who has not finished outside the top five all year.

Former world number one Jason Day called it quits after hitting his second shot into water at the par-five 16th, his seventh, and said that an MRI on Monday had revealed a disc tear.

"I woke up Sunday and I couldn't really walk," the Australian told Golf Channel.

"Couldn't sit in a car, it was really difficult. I ended up coming down here and seeing a physio and trying to do as much work as I possibly could to get ready for this week."

"It just wasn't going to work out."

FOCUS

# Doha 2019 to inspire next generation of female sports stars

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

With fans around the world gearing up for IAAF World Athletics Championships Doha 2019, organisers are working to inspire the next generation of female athletes in the six months build up to the competition.

More than 800 of the world's leading female athletes will be the focus of the sporting world in September, with the Local Organising Committee (LOC) pledging to showcase the pathways and opportunities to success, inspiring future female athletes.

Through the engaging schools programme across Qatar, with the support of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and initiatives, including IAAF Kid's Athletics, hundreds of girls are set to learn about the IAAF World Athletics Championships. A number of educational and physical activities across new activations will promote the opportunities that sport and athletics has to offer throughout the country for young females.

With the organisers' efforts encouraging everybody to Aim Beyond, focus will see girls aged between 5 and 12 engage in new sporting opportunities, which aims to increase the continuous growth of female sport participation in Qatar.

LOC director-general and IAAF vice-president Dahlan al-Hamad said, "Each year we



IAAF World Athletics Championships Doha 2019 Local Organising Committee has been running an engaging schools programme attracting hundreds of girls to take up sport and physical activities.

see further participation from young Qatari females in the sporting world, with new targets met, yet there is still so much more potential that can be unlocked.

"It is never too late for somebody to achieve their goals and having the world's best athletes coming to Doha later this year

provides the perfect platform to engage and inspire the stars of tomorrow, showing girls that anything is possible."

Taking place for the first time in the Middle East, the IAAF World Athletics Championships Doha 2019 will be the biggest sporting event the region has ever hosted. The championships

will bring together more than 2,000 athletes from 213 world countries, along with 10,000 international guests, spectators and media representatives from around the world.

Ticket packages for the widely anticipated event went on sale for fans and families across the world in September on the of-

ficial IAAF website at <https://iaafworldathleticschamps.com/doha2019/tickets>.

With seat prices starting at an affordable QR58, tickets have been selling well with some categories selling out eight months ahead of the opening ceremony at the Khalifa International Stadium.



## Back injury strikes Day as Players Championship and Masters loom

Reuters  
Cary, North Carolina

Former world number one Jason Day hopes the back pain that prompted his withdrawal from the Arnold Palmer Invitational will not prevent his participation in next week's Players Championship.

The Australian lasted less than seven holes at Bay Hill on Thursday before pulling out after hitting his second shot into water at the par-five 16th in Florida.

He grabbed a sweater out of his bag and walked off the course, before saying that an MRI on Monday had revealed a tear in a disc.

"I woke up Sunday and I couldn't really walk," Day told Golf Channel.

"Couldn't sit in a car, it was really difficult. So I ended up coming down here and seeing a physio and trying to do as much work as I possibly could to get ready for this week. It just wasn't going to work out."

"I couldn't play at like 100% today. I just wanted to see if I got out here and it may have loosened up, but unfortunately



ly it didn't." Day, 31, won the Players Championship three years ago during a nearly year-long hot streak in which he was clearly the best player in the world. He was stricken with back pain later that year, pulling out during consecutive tournaments at the end of the PGA Tour season with what he said was a strained ligament. As for whether he would play next week, Day said: "It's too early to tell right now. "I think it's just rest, to be honest, and hopefully I'll be ready." Looming further down the track is the year's first major, the April 11-14 Masters.

3RD ODI

# Khawaja, bowlers help Australia outplay India

Kohli's 41st ODI ton in vain as hosts are bundled out for 281 in 314-run chase

AFP  
Ranchi, India

Opener Usman Khawaja's maiden one-day international century and incisive bowling helped Australia outplay India by 32 runs to stay alive in the five-match series yesterday.

Adam Zampa led the bowling charge with three wickets including the prized scalp of India captain Virat Kohli, for 123, to help dismiss the hosts for 281 in 48.2 overs while chasing 314 in Ranchi. India lead the series 2-1.

Fast bowlers Pat Cummins and Jhye Richardson also took three wickets each and combined to wipe off the Indian tail after Kohli's second successive ton gave the tourists a scare.

Kohli, who hit a match-winning 116 in the second ODI, smashed 16 fours and a six during his 95-ball knock before being bowled off Zampa's leg-spin googly.

For Australia, Khawaja, who made 104, and skipper Aaron Finch, who hit 93, put on a 193-run opening stand to guide their team to 313 for five after being put in to bat.

"It was a pretty good performance. To get 300 on that wicket was very good. It was nice and especially in these conditions," Finch said after the win.

"I have been working really hard and have always had the faith I would get runs. Usman played a fantastic knock, Jhye was also impressive with the ball," he added.

Finch, whose last significant one-day score was a 100 in England in June 2018, struck form with his 19th ODI 50 but fell short of the three-figure mark after being trapped lbw off Kuldeep Yadav, who took three wickets.

His 99-ball knock was laced with 10 fours and 3 sixes.

The left-handed Khawaja, who hit 11 fours and a six in his



Australia's Usman Khawaja (left) plays a shot during the third ODI against India in Ranchi yesterday. (AFP)



India's Virat Kohli scored his 41st ODI century yesterday. (AFP)

## Scorecard

### AUSTRALIA

A. Finch lbw b Yadav	93
U. Khawaja c Bumrah b Shami	104
G. Maxwell run out (Jadeja/Dhoni)	47
S. Marsh c Shankar b Yadav	7
M. Stoinis not out	31
P. Handscomb lbw b Yadav	0
A. Carey not out	21
<b>Extras</b> (w6, lb4)	10
<b>Total</b> (5 wickets, 50 overs)	313
<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-193 (Finch), 2-239 (Khawaja), 3-258 (Maxwell), 4-263 (Marsh), 5-263 (Handscomb)	
<b>Bowling:</b> Shami 10-0-52-1 (w1),	

Bumrah 10-0-53-0 (w1), Jadeja 10-0-64-0, Yadav 10-0-64-3, Shankar 8-0-44-0, Jadhav 2-0-32-0 (w2)	
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### INDIA

S. Dhawan c Maxwell b Richardson	1
R. Sharma lbw b Cummins	14
V. Kohli b Zampa	123
A. Rayudu b Cummins	2
M.S. Dhoni b Zampa	26
K. Jadhav lbw b Zampa	26
V. Shankar c Richardson b Lyon	32
R. Jadeja c Maxwell b Richardson	24
K. Yadav c Finch b Cummins	10

M. Shami c Cummins b Richardson	8
J. Bumrah not out	0
<b>Extras</b> (b1, lb10, w4)	15
<b>Total</b> (all out, 48.2 overs)	281

<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-11 (Dhawan), 2-15 (Sharma), 3-27 (Rayudu), 4-86 (Dhoni), 5-174 (Jadhav), 6-219 (Kohli), 7-251 (Shankar), 8-273 (Jadeja), 9-281 (Shami), 10-281 (Yadav)	
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<b>Bowling:</b> Cummins 8.2-1-37-3, Richardson 9-2-37-3, Stoinis 6-0-39-0, Lyon 10-0-57-1 (w2), Zampa 10-0-70-3 (w2), Maxwell 5-0-30-0	
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**RESULT:** Australia won by 32 runs

113-ball knock, kept up the pace during a 46-run second-wicket stand with the in-form Glenn Maxwell, who made 47.

**'A LITTLE HICCUP'** Khawaja fell to paceman Mo-

hamed Shami and Maxwell, who smashed three fours and three sixes in his 31-ball blitz, was run out by wicketkeeper Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

Yadav soon tried to check Australia's surge with his left-

arm wrist spin as he sent back Shaun Marsh, for seven, and Peter Handscomb, for nought, in the space of three deliveries.

But Marcus Stoinis, on 31, and Alex Carey, on 21, put on an unbeaten 50-run stand to take Aus-

tralia well past the 300-run mark. Kohli, the world's top-ranked ODI batsman, tried to set up India's chase after they were in trouble at 86 for four following the departure of Dhoni for 26.

The 30-year-old Kohli, who registered 41st ODI ton, built crucial partnerships including an 88-run fifth-wicket stand with Kedar Jadhav to challenge the opposition attack.

Vijay Shankar also made a useful 32 but the ever-increasing run rate got to the Indian chase.

"I was very disappointed when I got out. I really thought we had a chance with the difference being 20 between balls and runs," said Kohli.

"Australia played better on the day. Adam bowled well and they won the game. We will have a few changes in the next couple of games.

"A little hiccup in the middle but we will re-group and come back stronger."

The fourth ODI is tomorrow in Chandigarh.

SPOTLIGHT

## Pakistan welcomes foreign cricket stars for Twenty20 league

AFP  
Karachi

Cricket-mad Pakistan is welcoming a host of foreign stars who defied security fears and Indian-Pakistani tensions to feature in the last eight matches of its domestic Twenty20 League, starting in Karachi from today.

The first 26 matches of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) were played in United Arab Emirates, and there had been speculation that remainder would also have to be held there as soaring tensions between Islamabad and New Delhi sparked fears of an all-out conflict.

But with the situation easing the matches will go ahead, though those that had been planned for Lahore — close to the Indian border — will now be held in the southern port city of Karachi.

Some 40 foreign players — led by former Australian all-rounder Shane Watson, current New Zealand opener Colin Munro and West Indian stars Dwayne Bravo, Darren Sammy and Kieron Pollard — were scheduled to arrive in Karachi yesterday to join the six-team competition.

Watson, who plays for Quetta Gladiators but declined to visit Pakistan for the PSL final and three play-off matches in 2017, said he consulted his family before taking the trip.

"It was a tough decision to make," said Watson, who played 59 Tests, 190 one-day and 58 Twenty20 internationals for Australia before retiring in 2016.

"It's been 14 years since I last visited Pakistan, a place with some of the most passionate fans in world cricket. Can't wait to give it our best shot in winning the trophy," Watson said in a video message released by the Gladiators.

He was part of the last Australian 'A' team that toured Pakistan in 2005.

The chief executive of the International Cricket Council

David Richardson and Cricket Australia head of security Sean Carroll are among the foreign officials who are also set to visit.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Ehsan Mani said the matches will help improve the country's chances of reviving international cricket. "I am delighted to welcome the foreign players who have come here for the PSL and I am sure it will help us bringing more international matches to the country," said Mani.

Pakistan has gradually revived international cricket since it was suspended following attacks on the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore ten years ago.

It was six years before Pakistan hosted any international cricket when Zimbabwe toured in 2015, while the Gaddafi Stadium hosted the PSL final in March 2017, and a World XI also played three Twenty20 internationals in Lahore.

### GRADUAL RETURN

But the biggest event was Sri Lanka's return for a one-off Twenty20 international in October 2017.

Mani said holding the remainder of the PSL this year, including the March 17 final, and a possible 16 PSL matches next year will add to the momentum.

"The perception that foreigners have about the safety situation in Pakistan will change and they will be satisfied with the security arrangements," he said.

Some 13,000 policemen and 2,500 para-military personnel will be on duty in Karachi, and police said fans will be required to show their tickets and national identity cards.

England's Liam Dawson, part of the Peshawar team, said he looks forward to playing before passionate crowds.

"I toured Pakistan last year and the atmosphere was unbelievable. We played three games and the crowd was electric," he recalled.

"It will be the same this time as well and I am happy to be part of that cricket revival."



Pakistani paramilitary soldiers stand guard at the National Cricket Stadium in Karachi on Thursday. (AFP)

## Afghan, Nabi, Khan star in Afghanistan's big ODI win

AFP  
Dehradun, India

Gritty half-centuries from skipper Asghar Afghan, Mohamed Nabi and Rashid Khan set up Afghanistan's convincing 109-run win over Ireland in the fourth one-day international yesterday. Afghan, who made 54, and Nabi,

who top-scored with 64, lifted Afghanistan from a precarious 81 for six to 223 all out in 49.1 overs in the north Indian city of Dehradun.

Paceman Aftab Alam led the bowling charge with four wickets to dismiss Ireland for 114 in 35.3 overs as Afghanistan took a 2-1 lead in the five-match series. Khan, who made 52 while batting, and fellow spinner Mujeeb

Ur Rahman claimed two wickets each to flatten Ireland's chase. "The top-order batsmen didn't play well but Rashid (batting at number nine) did the job for us," Afghan said of his man of the match leg-spinner.

Afghanistan faltered after being put into bat, losing more than half their side in the 18th over against a lethal bowling attack led by off-spinner Andy McBrine.

McBrine and paceman Boyd Rankin took two wickets each while James Cameron-Dow, who rattled the middle-order including Nabi's prized scalp, returned figures of 3-32 in his 10 overs.

**BRIEF SCORES:** Afghanistan 223 (Nabi 64, Asghar 54, Rashid 52, Cameron-Dow 3-32) beat Ireland 114 (Alam 4-25, Rashid 2-22, Mujeeb 2-25) by 109 runs

## Bowlers likely to benefit after rain washes out Day 1

Reuters  
Wellington

New Zealand and Bangladesh coaches agreed that whoever wins the toss in the second Test is likely to benefit from a seam-friendly pitch that is only going to assist the bowlers further after torrential rain washed out the first day

yesterday.

"I'd imagine there will be plenty in it for the bowling team for certainly the first two days, maybe even longer," New Zealand coach Gary Stead said.

"It looked a pretty green wicket, really well grassed. My view is it is likely to be on the slow side early on and hopefully some sun and wind gets on it, then it might speed up and flatten out

a wee bit."

While play has been scheduled to start 30 minutes earlier today, rain is still forecast until at least noon with showers expected for the rest of the day.

Bangladesh coach Steve Rhodes said, "There's a lot of moisture around and I'd imagine tomorrow morning the wicket will do quite a bit first thing. It makes the toss quite crucial."

FOCUS

# Smith, Warner omitted from Australia ODI squad

Reuters  
Melbourne

Steve Smith and David Warner will have to find form in the Indian Premier League to win places in Australia's squad for the World Cup after being left out of the final warm-up series against Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates.

Selectors named an unchanged 15-man squad for the five ODI matches in the Gulf and said it had been agreed the Twenty20 competition in India was the "best pathway" for the pair as they each recover from elbow injuries and serve out the final weeks of their ball-tampering bans.

"Cricket Australia will continue to liaise with both Steve, David and their IPL clubs to monitor progress as we build towards the ICC World Cup and the Ashes," selector Trevor Hohns said in a media release.



David Warner (left) and Steve Smith will play in the IPL next.

The pair's ball-tampering bans expire on March 28, which would have made them eligible to play in the final two matches of the UAE series in Dubai on March 29 and March 31.

Smith will play for Rajasthan Royals, with Warner to feature for Sunrisers Hyderabad in the

IPL, which starts March 23. The 15-man squad for the World Cup will be named on April 23.

In a blow for Australia's hopes of building momentum for the World Cup in England starting late May, pace spearhead Mitchell Starc has been ruled out of the squad after a setback during his recovery from a

left pectoral strain. "This has ruled him out of the Pakistan series and while frustrating for all involved, our focus is to have Mitch ready for the World Cup," Hohns said.

Starc had already been ruled out of the ongoing ODI series in India, which Aaron Finch captained Australia currently trail 2-1.

Fast bowler Kane Richardson has been included in the squad despite returning home from India with a side strain.

The five-match series against Pakistan starts March 22 in Sharjah.

**SQUAD:** Aaron Finch (captain), Usman Khawaja, Shaun Marsh, Peter Handscomb, Glenn Maxwell, Ashton Turner, Marcus Stoinis, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins, Nathan Coulter-Nile, Jhye Richardson, Kane Richardson, Jason Behrendorff, Nathan Lyon, Adam Zampa

## Pakistan rest Sarfraz, key players for Australia ODIs

Pakistan selectors sprung a surprise yesterday by resting regular skipper Sarfraz Ahmed and five key players for the five-match one-day series against Australia this month. While chief selector Inzamam-ul-Haq stressed that resting Sarfraz was a unanimous decision, media reports blasted the move, suggesting Sarfraz did not want to miss all five matches. Apart from Sarfraz, opener Fakhar Zaman, batsman Babar Azam, spinner Shadab Khan and fast bowlers Hasan Ali and Shaheen Shah Afridi will also be rested.

Inzamam said the decision was aimed at freshening up the squad for the 2019 World Cup, starting in England in May. "We have the World Cup as our focus and since the team is

playing non-stop cricket we are resting some players, including captain Sarfraz, as we want the players to be fresh for the mega event," he said. Shoaib Malik will lead the side for the matches to be played in Sharjah on March 22 and 24, Abu Dhabi on March 27, and Dubai on March 29 and 31. Another batsman, Mohamed Hafeez, was not considered as he is recovering from thumb surgery. Maverick batsman Umar Akmal, who played the last of his 116 one-day internationals against Australia more than two years ago, was recalled.

He was sent back home from the Champions Trophy in England in 2017 after failing a fitness test. The squad also has uncapped 31-year-old batsman Abid Ali

and rookie fast bowler Mohamed Hasnain. "Hasnain has been identified as one of the fast bowlers for the future," said Inzamam. "The 18-year-old has not only bowled with pace, regularly clocking 145 kmh (90 mph), he has shown tremendous control with the ball," he added. Test specialists Yasir Shah and Mohamed Abbas are also included in the squad. Abbas has never played a one-day international before.

**SQUAD:** Shoaib Malik (captain), Abid Ali, Faheem Ashraf, Haris Sohail, Imad Wasim, Imam-ul-Haq, Junaid Khan, Mohamed Abbas, Mohamed Amir, Mohamed Hasnain, Mohamed Rizwan, Saad Ali, Shan Masood, Umar Akmal, Usman Shinwari, Yasir Shah

FOCUS

## UEFA explains controversial VAR decisions

**London:** UEFA took the unusual step yesterday to explain a series of controversial Video Assistant Referees (VAR) calls in this week's Champions League last 16 ties.

European football's governing body bowed to pressure by bringing forward the introduction of VAR into the Champions League for the knockout rounds, having not used the technology for the group stages.

Ajax and Manchester United benefited from disputed decisions in sealing dramatic comebacks to eliminate hold-

ers Real Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain.

The handball given against PSG defender Presnel Kimpembe to award United a stoppage time penalty, which Marcus Rashford converted to complete a 3-1 win on the night at the Parc des Princes and progress on away goals, was branded "a disgrace" by injured PSG star Neymar.

Even former United players Rio Ferdinand and Michael Owen said in their roles at TV pundits the penalty should not have been awarded.

However, UEFA explained why Slovenian referee Damir

Skomina reversed his original decision not to point to the spot having been alerted to watch a replay of the incident by the VAR.

"Following the on-field review, the referee confirmed that the distance that the ball travelled was not short and the impact could therefore not be unexpected," said UEFA's statement.

"The defender's arm was not close to the body, which made the defender's body bigger thus resulting in the ball being stopped from travelling in the direction of the goal. The referee, therefore,

awarded a penalty kick."

Ajax's third goal in a 4-1 win at the Santiago Bernabeu was reviewed over whether the ball had gone out for what would have been a Madrid throw-in prior to Dusan Tadic's finish.

UEFA said referee Felix Brych was right to award the goal in the absence of conclusive proof the ball crossed the touchline.

Porto's comeback from a 2-1 first leg defeat to beat Roma 3-1 after extra-time was also marked by big VAR calls.

The Portuguese side's winner came from a penalty

awarded by VAR three minutes from time.

Roma then had a penalty claim of their own turned down when Patrik Schick tumbled inside the area.

"Last year we asked for VAR in the Champions League because we got screwed in the semi-final and tonight, they've got VAR and we still get robbed," raged Roma president James Pallotta.

However, UEFA insisted on the Schick incident "no clear and obvious error had occurred and that there was no ground for a VAR intervention and an on-field review."

SPOTLIGHT

## Liverpool title win will not heal Gerrard's 'wound'

AFP  
London

**A**s a Liverpool captain, Steven Gerrard won almost every trophy bar the Premier League and despite urging Jurgen Klopp's men to end the club's 29-year wait for the title this season he admits it will not ease his personal pain.

Gerrard, now manager of Scottish giants Rangers, famously slipped to hand Chelsea the opener of a 2-0 win at Anfield in April 2014 with Liverpool on course to win the league.

Liverpool currently trail Manchester City by one point at the top of the table with nine games remaining.

"This wound has been open since my experience. I'm not sure it'll close because I can't change that experience," Gerrard, who left Liverpool after 17 years as a player in 2015, told reporters.

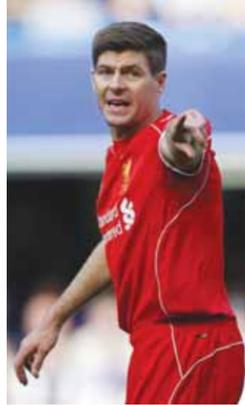
"It doesn't affect how I feel now. I look at a squad of players, some of whom I'm still friends with.

"I see a support that gave me absolutely everything from the terraces and around the world.

"I just hope for their sake, and mine as a supporter, that come the end of the competition they are victorious. But it won't make me or my wound feel any different."

Klopp's side have been accused of letting the pressure get to them in recent weeks, having blown the chance to open up a seven-point lead over City just over a month ago by drawing at home to Leicester and have since been held on the road by West Ham, Manchester United and Everton.

"My advice, having been a player in that team and playing for those supporters for so long, would be don't overthink it. Just enjoy it. Believe in yourselves," added Gerrard.



"I think it is only normal for the supporters. They want it more than anyone. They will help. The players have to see it as a help rather than a hindrance.

"When we were in that situation, I didn't feel suffocated from the fans. I actually felt they were right behind us and with us and wanted it so much. I saw it as a help rather than a hindrance."

The 18-time English champions could easily set a club record points tally and still fall short of a relentless City side, that romped to the league with 100 points last season.

And Gerrard insists should that be the case, Liverpool's season should not be seen as a failure.

"Certain people will see it as failure but that is football and opinions. Jurgen has taken the squad forward giant strides. He's doing everything he can," he added.

"Sometimes in football, if someone beats you to it, you have to hold your hands up and say the better team won.

"I hope that's not the case but I don't think you can be too critical if you have been fantastic yourself and have done ever so well to be in it in the first place."

PREMIER LEAGUE

# Arsenal bid to slow United juggernaut

TALKING POINTS AHEAD OF THE WEEKEND'S PREMIER LEAGUE FIXTURES

AFP  
London

**A**rsenal host Manchester United in the Premier League this weekend in a game that could have a major bearing on who secures a coveted Champions League spot for next season.

Third-placed Tottenham, now realistically out of the title race, are just five points clear of sixth-placed Chelsea as the finishing line comes into sight.

Leaders Manchester City host Watford and Liverpool welcome Burnley to Anfield, while Spurs visit Southampton and Chelsea entertain Wolves.

Will fixture pile-up and injuries cost City?

Manchester City have been installed as favourites to retain their Premier League crown after retaking top spot from a faltering Liverpool, but the picture is more complicated than it seems.

Kevin De Bruyne limped off against Bournemouth last week to compound a miserable season for the Belgian while Fernando is also currently out of action.

One good piece of news for Guardiola is that defender Aymeric Laporte returned to training this week, though it is unclear when he will be ready for action. City are through to the FA Cup quarter-finals and look certain to progress next week to the last eight of the Champions League as they chase an unprecedented quadruple.

But despite the depth and quality of their squad, they need their big players available at the sharp end of the season.

Will Klopp trust Shaqiri?

Swiss forward Xherdan Shaqiri made a big impact in the first few months of his career at Liverpool but he appears to have slipped off Jurgen Klopp's radar in recent weeks.



Manchester United's Romelu Lukaku celebrates at the end of the Champions League match against PSG earlier this week. Lukaku could be the mainstay for United against Arsenal tomorrow.

Shaqiri was an unused substitute last week as Liverpool laboured to break down a stubborn Everton defence, drawing 0-0.

Former Liverpool striker John Aldridge believes Liverpool are missing the creative spark provided by Shaqiri.

"He's a player who can come on and change a game," Aldridge told the Liverpool Echo. "People are bound to question what's happened there because earlier in the season he was a great option off the bench.

"He's still our fourth top scorer behind the front three. We're not getting goals from all over the place and he would give us another threat."

Lethal Lukaku

Romelu Lukaku appeared to be one of the fall guys under Ole Gunnar Solskjaer as the Norwegian interim boss quickly made it clear that Marcus Rashford was his first choice up front.

Critics pointed to a heavy first touch and the fact he was carrying too much bulk.

A nine-game barren run appeared to justify the decision but the Belgian, taking advantage of a spate of injuries to United's forwards, has now turned his season around with six goals in three games.

Lukaku has improved his shot conversion rate under Solskjaer and has given United an extra goal threat, either down the right or in the middle.

Kane hunts Golden Boot

Harry Kane took advantage of a blank week for his main ri-

vals - Sergio Aguero, Mohamed Salah and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang - to revive his chances of winning a third Premier League Golden Boot in four seasons.

The England captain, who missed four Premier League games with an injured ankle, is on 16 goals, level with Aubameyang, one behind Salah and two adrift of Aguero.

With three goals in four games in all competitions since he returned from injury, Kane will fancy his chances against struggling Southampton.

Arsenal's last big test?

Arsenal have flown under the radar in recent weeks but have quietly been going about their business as they battle for a return to the Champions League after two seasons away from Europe's top table.

Unai Emery's men missed out on returning to the top four after Aubameyang saw his late penalty saved by Hugo Lloris in last week's north London derby draw against Tottenham.

But after their home game against Manchester United on Sunday, the fixture list looks kind, with none of the top six sides left to play.

For all Arsenal's inconsistency this season, the latest wobble a 3-1 Europa League defeat at Rennes, a return to the Champions League next season would be proof of progress in the post-Arsene Wenger era.

Fixtures (1500 GMT kick-off unless stated)

**Today**  
Crystal Palace v Brighton (1230), Cardiff v West Ham, Huddersfield v Bournemouth, Leicester v Fulham, Newcastle v Everton, Southampton v Tottenham, Manchester City v Watford (1730)  
**Tomorrow**  
Liverpool v Burnley (1200), Chelsea v Wolves (1405), Arsenal v Manchester United (1630)

Rennes stun 10-man Arsenal as Chelsea, Napoli close in on Europa quarters

**Rennes, France:** Chelsea and Napoli closed in on the Europa League quarter-finals, but Arsenal face a major battle to reach the last eight after a 3-1 defeat away to Rennes on Thursday.

Alex Iwobi gave the Gunners a perfect start in north-western France at a raucous Roazhon Park, but the match hinged on the sending-off of Arsenal defender Sokratis Papastathopoulos four minutes before half-time. Benjamin Bourigeaud equalised moments later, and the hosts' second-half pressure paid off as a Nacho Monreal own goal put Rennes ahead before Ismaila Sarr's late header gave them a two-goal cushion in the tie.

Unai Emery's side must now turn the tie around in the second leg in London next Thursday if they are to progress any further in a competition which represents their only hope of silverware this season, and offers a potential route into next season's Champions League

with Arsenal sitting outside the top four in the Premier League.

CHELSEA CRUISE

Chelsea may also need this competition to get back in the Champions League next season and the Blues eased past Dynamo Kiev 3-0 at Stamford Bridge courtesy of goals from Pedro Rodriguez, Willian and Callum Hudson-Odoi. Pedro could have had at least a hat-trick as Denys Boyko denied him four times after the Spaniard had turned home Olivier Giroud's flick to give Chelsea an early lead.

RESULTS

**Last 16, first leg**  
Eintracht Frankfurt (GER) 0 Inter Milan (ITA) 0  
Dynamo Zagreb (CRO) 1 (Petkovic 38-pen) Benfica (POR) 0  
Rennes (FRA) 3 (Bourigeaud 42, Monreal 65-og, Sarr 88) Arsenal (ENG) 1 (Iwobi 4)  
Chelsea (ENG) 3 (Pedro 17, Willian 65, Hudson-Odoi 90) Dynamo Kiev (UKR) 0

LA LIGA

# Real stars playing for futures as rebuild looms

AFP  
Madrid

**R**eal Madrid have 12 games left to salvage some pride and perhaps save Santiago Solari his job.

Although it is hard to imagine even the very best of run-ins allowing the Argentinian to remain as coach next season. Something close to 12 wins could do it, but even that is unlikely to persuade club president Florentino Perez to overlook a season that was over before the middle of March.

Besides, nothing Madrid have shown in recent weeks suggests they are set for a sprint-finish, still less a run that would make Barcelona nervous, the Catalans 12 points clear following their victory at the Santiago Bernabeu last weekend. Atletico Madrid, five points in front, are more catchable, particu-

larly if Diego Simeone's side complete the job against Juventus next week and the Champions League - not to mention a final at their own Wanda Metropolitan - becomes the key focus.

"We are sad and hurt," Solari said after the 4-1 defeat to Ajax on Tuesday. "But the season continues. It's true the gap in the league is very big but we have to stand up. Madrid always come back."

Just as finishing third in La Liga last season mattered little once Real were crowned European champions, snatching second after a miserable exit in the last 16 would certainly not make amends. Instead, Solari's beleaguered side face a struggling Real Valladolid tomorrow, looking for a victory to suggest their seven-day crisis will not give way to a three-month collapse.

Eight points should be enough to avoid dropping into a race for the top four, particularly given those closest are Getafe and Alaves, each enjoying

remarkable seasons but perhaps unlikely to storm down the home straight.

Which leaves the best part of 11 weeks for Madrid's players to convince the club of their own futures, as well as the future of their coach.

Regardless of what happens to Solari, this is the kind of season that prompts a rethink, and perhaps a revamp of the squad in the summer, with a handful of older players particularly under scrutiny. Gareth Bale, Marcelo, Toni Kroos, Casemiro and Karim Benzema have all under-performed to varying degrees in recent weeks.

"We've all failed to find our best level this season," said Kroos on Tuesday. "I'm the first to admit that." "We could have done so much more," said Nacho.

Conversely, Luka Modric, heavily linked with a move to Italy last summer, may feel it is time for a fresh start while there is little chance of Solari allowing Isco to prove his worth, although the

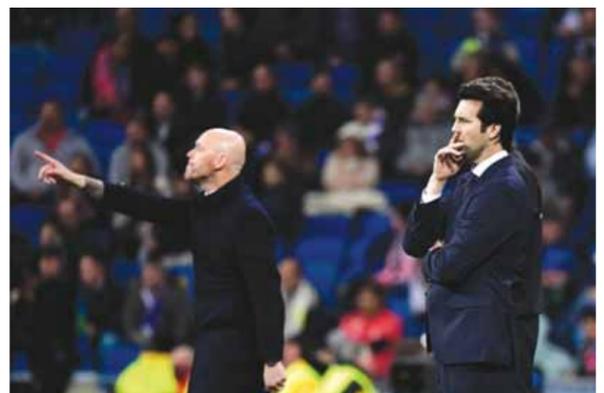
Spaniard's prospects would transform as soon as a new coach came in.

While Real Madrid are in the unusual position of focusing solely now on La Liga, Barcelona and Atletico will keep one eye on their own Champions League ties this weekend.

Atletico host Leganes today before taking a 2-0 lead over Juventus to Turin on Tuesday. Barca are at home to Rayo Vallecano, with a return against Lyon to come on Wednesday, following a goalless opening leg.

Fixtures (times GMT)

**Today**  
Alaves v Eibar (1200), Atletico Madrid v Leganes (1515), Barcelona v Rayo Vallecano (1730), Getafe v Huesca (2045)  
**Tomorrow**  
Celta Vigo v Real Betis (1100), Girona v Valencia (1515), Levante v Villarreal (1730), Sevilla v Real Sociedad (1730), Real Valladolid v Real Madrid (2045)



Ajax's Dutch coach Erik Ten Hag (L) gestures next to Real Madrid's Argentinian coach Santiago Solari during their UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg in Madrid on March 5. Solari's position is under threat at Real Madrid.

NBA

# Bucks bounce back from losses to punish Pacers

'It was great to get this win and get back to what we do'



Indiana Pacers forward Thaddeus Young knocks the ball away from Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo during the first quarter of their NBA game at Fiserv Forum. **PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports**

AFP  
Los Angeles

The NBA-best Milwaukee Bucks broke out of a mini slump and the Oklahoma City Thunder kept up their playoff push on Thursday.

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 29 points and made 12 rebounds as the first place Bucks regained their swagger by cruising to a 117-98 victory over the Indiana Pacers.

"We just tried to play hard and get back on track," Antetokounmpo said. "We got back to our old habits and started defending and helping one another on defence."

In the late game, Russell Westbrook and Paul George combined for 69 points as the Thunder overcame Damian Lillard's 51-points to beat the Trail Blazers 129-121 in a thrilling overtime contest in Portland.

The Bucks had hit a snag as they were coming off losing back-to-back games for the first time this season when they failed

to hold big leads against the Phoenix Suns and the Utah Jazz.

The funk didn't last long, though, as they bounced back nicely against the Pacers. Khris Middleton added 27 points for the Bucks, who improved to a NBA-best 49-16 on the season.

"The last two games we had trouble holding onto a lead," said Middleton. "It was great to get this win and get back to what we do."

Myles Turner had 22 points and Bojan Bogdanovic 17 for the Pacers, who lost star guard Victor Oladipo to a season-ending injury last month.

The loss also ended Bogdanovic's streak of five straight 20-point games.

The Bucks have now beaten the Pacers in four of five contests this season.

The Bucks opened their largest lead of the first half at 47-33 on two free throws by Antetokounmpo, but the Pacers went on a 17-7 run to close within 54-50 at the break. "Too much Antetokounmpo, too much Middleton," Pacers coach Nate

McMillan said. "When they have the attack at the basket and are knocking down threes, they're going to be tough to guard.

"They were pretty much knocking shots down from the perimeter and getting shots at the rim tonight. We missed some shots. We had some open looks that you need to knock down and we didn't early."

Milwaukee went on a 12-0 run early in the fourth quarter to take command of the game. Pacers Kyle O'Quinn scored a basket to cut the Bucks' lead to 84-74 to start the final quarter.

Milwaukee's Ersan Ilyasova sparked the run with a three pointer and Antetokounmpo capped it with a driving layup to make it 96-74 with 8:21 remaining.

Elsewhere, Westbrook scored 37 points and George tallied 32 points as the Thunder swept the season series against the Trail Blazers by winning all four games.

"In overtime we got three or four steps in a row and made some big buckets," said Westbrook. "It was a great road win for us,

especially this time of year."

Lillard also had nine assists, CJ McCollum added 25 points and Jusuf Nurkic had 13 points and 17 rebounds for the Trail Blazers.

In the overtime, Westbrook set the tone by scoring five of the Thunder's first seven points on a three-pointer and two free throws for a 120-117 lead with 2:53 left.

George hit one of two foul shots for a 121-117 advantage, and Westbrook's layup made it 123-117 with just over two minutes left. George made two foul shots for a seven-point lead with 55 seconds remaining.

The game got heated at times as Westbrook and George both had run-ins with Portland's Nurkic.

Nurkic, of Bosnia, received his second technical foul with four seconds left in the fourth which earned him an automatic ejection.

**RESULTS**  
Oklahoma City 129-121 Portland (OT)  
Milwaukee 117-98 Indiana

ATHLETICS

## Mo Farah hints at potential World Championships return

AFP  
London

British star Mo Farah could make a surprise return to the track to defend his 10,000m title at the World Championships.

Farah, a four-time Olympic gold medal winner, ended his track career in 2017 to concentrate on marathon running.

But the 35-year-old has hinted he may be ready for a comeback in Doha later this year. Farah will run in the Big Half marathon in London tomorrow as part of his build-up to April's London Marathon.

Farah has confirmed that if he wins the London Marathon, then competing at the World Championships in the 10,000m is a genuine possibility.

"It all depends on the result in London. Having seen my fellow athletes, who I've competed against in the past, and watching the European Indoor Championships on TV, I was thinking 'Oh man! I want to

get back out there," Farah said yesterday.

"I miss the sort of atmosphere Laura Muir got. You get it at the London Marathon but I do miss the track. I do miss representing my country.

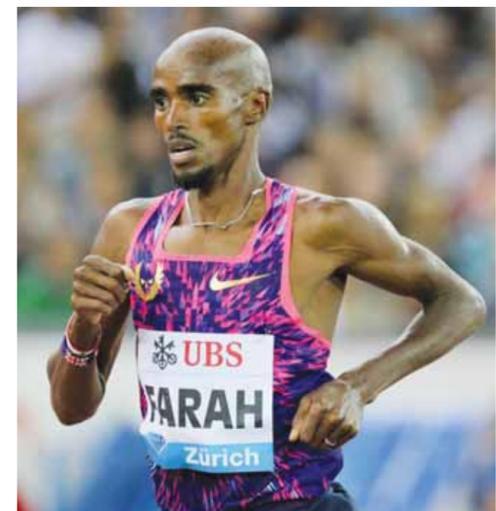
"That's just me. If things are going well and I've got a chance to win a medal, then I'd love to come back and run for my country but my aim now is to concentrate on the marathon.

"My aim is to win London one day, I think if I can win it, at least you know you've achieved it.

"That would be another way of going back to the track, seeing what you can do. My aim is to do well in London but if it doesn't go well, then I don't know."

Farah turned his back on the track after winning a third consecutive 10,000m gold at the World Championships in London two years ago.

"I had said to myself that I wanted to finish in London," he added. "I was thinking 'I just want to do marathons and it's going to get easier! It's not easier,' he added.



### Hall of Fame pitcher Seaver diagnosed with dementia

Former New York Mets all-star pitcher Tom Seaver has been diagnosed with dementia at the age of 74, a spokesman for the New York Mets announced on Thursday.

The 12-time all star, who was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1992, will retire from public life, the Seaver family said.

Seaver won the Cy Young Award as baseball's top pitcher three times and helped power the Mets to a memorable World Series triumph in 1969.

The Mets are planning to celebrate that World Series' team in June.

"We've been in contact with the Seaver family and are aware of his health situation. Although he's unable to attend the '69 Anniversary, we are planning to honour him in special ways and have included his family in our plans. Our thoughts are with Tom, Nancy and the entire Seaver family," said Mets spokesman Jeff Wilpon.

Seaver was named the 1967 Rookie of the Year. He led the league in strikeouts five times and finished his career with 311 wins and 3,640 strikeouts.

He also pitched for the Cincinnati Reds and Chicago White Sox, and finished his 20-year career with the Boston Red Sox in 1986.

NHL

# Blues blast Kings to boost play-off hopes

Reuters  
Los Angeles

Vladimir Tarasenko and Ryan O'Reilly bookended the second period with goals, and the visiting St. Louis Blues strengthened their play-off chances with a 4-0 victory over the Los Angeles Kings.

Tyler Bozak also scored a second-period goal for the Blues, while Ivan Barbashev added an insurance goal in the third period. Goaltender Jake Allen made 28 saves, including a dazzling snag with his blocker hand to protect a gaping side of the net in the third period, for his third shutout of the season.

St. Louis, the third-place team in the Central Division, increased its point total to 78 and maintained distance from the fourth-place Dallas Stars (75 points), who are the wild-card leader in the Western Conference and beat the Colorado Avalanche on Thursday. The Kings' struggles continued, as they dropped their second consecutive game and were defeated for the 12th time in their last 13 games. At 56 points, the Kings are the worst team in the Western Conference and the second worst team in the NHL, ahead of just the Ottawa Senators (52 points).

The Blues improved to 2-0 on their three-game road trip through California, a stretch that coincides with centre Brayden Schenn's return from an upper-body injury.

RESULTS		
Boston	4-3	Florida
Pittsburgh	3-0	Columbus
Islanders	4-2	Ottawa
Detroit	3-2	Rangers
Minnesota	3-0	Tampa Bay
Chicago	5-4	Buffalo
Dallas	4-0	Colorado
Edmonton	3-2	Vancouver
Arizona	2-0	Calgary
St. Louis	4-0	Los Angeles
San Jose	5-2	Montreal

Schenn had an assist on Tarasenko's and O'Reilly's goals, as the Blues' top line delivered again. In a 5-4 come-from-behind victory at Anaheim on Wednesday, Schenn, Tarasenko and O'Reilly combined for two goals and four assists.

After a scoreless first period, Tarasenko delivered a goal 25 seconds into the second, his 28th of the season. His blast from just inside the left circle easily beat Kings goaltender Jonathan Quick to the glove side.

The Kings' defense was able to hold tight until Bozak scored a goal, his 11th, with less than two minutes remaining in the second period for a 2-0 lead.

With two seconds remaining in the sec-

ond period, O'Reilly gave the Blues a 3-0 lead when he scored off of a pass from Schenn for his 26th of the season.

Schenn's influence on the Blues has been clear since his return. He has not only guided St. Louis to consecutive victories, but the Blues were on an 11-game winning streak before he missed time. While he was out of action, the Blues went 2-3-1.

Meanwhile, Minnesota goaltender Devan Dubnyk made 25 saves and Jason Zucker scored a hat trick as the visiting Wild cooled off Tampa Bay in a 3-0 win on Thursday, breaking the Lightning's eight-game home winning streak.

Dubnyk recorded his second shutout this season and the 31st of his career and improved to 6-0-1 in his last seven starts for the Wild. The Lightning's Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 27 shots and saw his 10-game winning streak end.

Zucker recorded the hat trick when he tallied his 20th of the season into an empty net with 1:46 left in regulation, giving him eight points in his past seven games.

Eric Staal's assist on the last goal pushed his season-high point streak to eight games. Ryan Donato notched a pair of assists for Minnesota, which is 6-0-2 in its past eight games. In another match, Patrice Bergeron produced two goals — including the go-ahead score with 6.7 seconds left — as host Boston rallied to score twice in the final minute and stun Florida.



Minnesota Wild left wing Jason Zucker is congratulated as he scores a goal against the Tampa Bay Lightning during the first period at Amalie Arena. **PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports**

## SIX NATIONS RUGBY

# Coach Jones backs Te'o and Tuilagi to shine against Italy

'Manu is really starting to come back to where he can be'

AFP  
London

England coach Eddie Jones will unleash a powerful midfield pairing of Ben Te'o and Manu Tuilagi against perennial Six Nations strugglers Italy at Twickenham today as he explores his options ahead of this year's World Cup.

It will be the first time the two dynamic ball-carriers, who both have Pacific Islands heritage, have started a Test together, with Henry Slade dropped to the bench to accommodate Tuilagi's move to outside centre and Te'o's return.

This season has seen Tuilagi make his first Six Nations start in six years after a miserable run of injuries, with the Leicester midfielder in the starting XV for all three of England's previous matches - including the 21-13 defeat by Wales in Cardiff a fortnight ago that scuppered their hopes of a Grand Slam.

"They're both very good players," said Jones, who has also recalled powerhouse right wing Joe Cokanasiga.

The Australian was especially excited by how Tuilagi had coped with opposing speedy England wing Jonny May in training.

"Manu is really starting to come back to where he can be," insisted Jones.

"In training, Jonny May went to go around him and Manu rounded him up. I haven't seen that sort of acceleration from Manu for a long time."

Jones said an overtly physical midfield would be important against Italy, for all they have yet to beat England in 24 attempts and are also on a 20-game overall losing streak in the Six Nations.

"In certain games it's massively important, when maybe you're not getting fast ruck ball and the only way to get through the line is by smashing through it," added the former Wallaby and Japan boss.

"Maybe it's going to be that sort of game on Saturday. Italy are a difficult opponent."

Meanwhile Jones tried to put the Wales defeat in context by saying it was part of England's evolution. "The great thing about rugby is you never get there, you are always striving to get there," he said.

"You are climbing up Mount Everest and you never get to the top, you are always trying to get there and sometimes you slip down a bit."

It was a view endorsed by



England's Manu Tuilagi and Ben Te'o during a training session yesterday. (Reuters)

England captain Owen Farrell, who insisted he had not been distracted by recent newspaper allegations that he and his club Saracens, the English champions, had broken Premiership salary-cap regulations.

"We're just concentrating on what's in front of us," said the fly-half. "We're all part of a team that wants to bring more out of ourselves and also enjoy what we are doing."

## 'DELUSIONAL' ITALY

England were embarrassed by Italy coach Conor O'Shea's 'no ruck' ploy during an eventual 36-15 win at Twickenham two years ago, with Jones decidedly unimpressed. The memory clearly rankled judging by his comment on Thursday that "when Italy are allowed to play rugby they are a good team."

But Jones lauded an Italy back-row featuring No 8 great Sergio Parisse and also hailed centres Michele Campagnaro and Luca Morisi as "good strong, dynamic players" before saying scrum-half Tito Telbadi "played like he was playing for his life against Ireland".

## Wales aim to sidestep domestic chaos against Scotland

Warren Gatland will be protecting an 18-year unbeaten personal record against Scotland when he bids to emerge from a week of turmoil in Welsh rugby by moving within one step of an historic Grand Slam hat-trick at Murrayfield today.

Wales were beaten 29-13 in Edinburgh two years ago but that was when Gatland, the mastermind of their current all-time record run of 12 successive victories, was on a sabbatical as coach of the British and Irish Lions, with Rob Howley in temporary charge.

Following wins against France, Italy and England, Gatland is on course to emulate his Grand Slam successes of 2008 and 2012 in his final season with Wales.

No coach has ever achieved three clean sweeps in the Five or Six Nations Championship, with the native New Zealander currently level on two with Wales's John Dawes, England's Geoff Cooke and France's Jacques Fouroux, Jean-Claude Skrela and Bernard Laporte.

In his 12 seasons in charge of Wales, Gatland has won all ten of the matches he has contested against Scotland. He last suffered defeat against the Scots in his final year in charge of Ireland - a 32-10 loss at Murrayfield in September 2001.

A potential Grand Slam clincher awaits his current in-form Wales side against Ireland in Cardiff on Saturday week if they can maintain the winning form they launched with a home victory against Italy on March 11 last year and which gathered momentum with their stunning 21-13 success against England in

Cardiff two weeks ago. Wales have not lost since a 37-27 reverse against Ireland in Dublin on February 24 last year. Scotland, by contrast, will kick-off on Saturday following back-to-back defeats at home to Ireland and away to France.

But any threat of complacency may have been removed by a week of wrangling in Welsh rugby, with Gatland admitting his players had been "distracted" by failed attempts to merge the Ospreys and Scarlets. Of Gatland's 23-man squad, 13 are employed by the two regional franchises, who insisted on Wednesday the proposed deal had been scrapped. Against that turbulent background, Gatland has made just the one enforced change to his starting XV, with Ospreys lock Adam Beard replacing the injured Cory Hill.

Wales captain Alun Wyn Jones, speaking at Murrayfield on Friday, said: "Obviously, we want a few more answers after the Six Nations, but we've got a job to get on with."

Scotland have been bolstered by the return from injury of two key players in fly-half Finn Russell and tighthead prop Willem Nel.

And Scotland coach Gregor Townsend has gone even further following a lacklustre 27-10 defeat against France by dropping captain Greig Laidlaw to the bench, with Glasgow's Ali Price stepping up to the starting scrum-half berth.

Hooker Stuart McInally will lead the side. Pete Horne moves from fly-half to inside centre, with Edinburgh wing Darcy Graham making his first start, in place of the injured Sean Maitland.

## TENNIS

## Querrey shakes off sluggish start to advance

Reuters  
Indian Wells, USA

American Sam Querrey bounced back from a sluggish start to claim a 7-6(5) 2-6 6-4 win over Matteo Berrettini during a windy first-round match at the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells on Thursday.

The hard-hitting Californian was in a hole at 3-0, 40-0 down in the first set but rallied to break back and ultimately force a tiebreak he won to the delight of the partisan crowd.

Berrettini came out in full force to win the second set but Querrey's blistering serve, highlighted by an unreturnable second serve on match point, eventually proved too much for the Italian.

"It was windy all day, which made things tough. It was one of those matches I'm happy to just kind of get through it," Querrey said in an interview after the match.

Next up for Querrey on Saturday is a re-match with 13th seed Milos Raonic, who won their Indian Wells quarter-final contest a year ago.

Querrey, who plays a similar style to the big-serving Ca-

nadian, said the key would be taking advantage of rare break point opportunities.

"When you play a guy like him you hopefully get a couple of break points during a match and you have to come out on top of those," he said.

"Last year he did a better job of winning those big points."

Another Californian, qualifier Marcos Giron, also won his first-round match with victories in two tiebreakers seeing off Frenchman Jeremy Chardy 7-6(3) 7-6(1).

Giron, who needed a wild card just to get into the qualifiers, will next face Australian Alex de Minaur, the 23rd seed.

German Jan-Lennard Struff thumped six aces to send Australian John Millman packing 6-1 6-3 in their evening clash. Other first-round winners on Thursday included Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka, German Philipp Kohlschreiber, Slovak Martin Klizan and 18-year-old Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime.

Earlier in the day, Grigor Dimitrov withdrew from the tournament with a shoulder injury. The Bulgarian has not played since the Australian Open and will look to return to the court at next month's Miami Open.



Sam Querrey during his first round match against Matteo Berrettini (not pictured) in the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports.

## Venus outlasts Petkovic to enter second round of Indian Wells

Former world number one Venus Williams emerged from a back-and-forth battle with a 6-4, 0-6, 6-3 victory over German Andrea Petkovic to reach the second round at Indian Wells on Thursday.

The US veteran said she wasn't feeling her best, and was at a loss for words to explain the win.

"I don't know honestly. I'm still trying to figure it out," said Williams, who closed out the first set after a visit from the trainer, before Petkovic had the second set all her own way.

Williams was broken as she served for the match at 5-2 in the third, wasting one match point. Petkovic had a game point to extend the match before Williams broke her in the final game seal the victory. "Every day is not your best day but that doesn't mean the heart and desire aren't there," Williams

said. "I'm just happy things went my way in the third set. It got really close there. Williams was playing her first match since a third-round loss to then world number one Simona Halep at the Australian Open.

"I haven't played in forever, so that was challenging in itself, to get back into competition," said the 38-year-old who next faces third-seeded Czech Petra Kvitova - this year's Australian Open runner-up. Serena Williams, also playing her first tournament since falling in the Australian Open quarter-finals, opens with a blockbuster second round match against another former world number one Victoria Azarenka. Azarenka, now ranked 48th in the world, defeated Vera Lapko in straight sets on Wednesday to set up the clash that will highlight night session.

## SELECTION

# Schmidt omits star O'Brien for France clash

AFP  
Maynooth, Ireland

Veteran flanker Sean O'Brien has been omitted from the Ireland squad for the Six Nations clash with France tomorrow and replaced by Leinster teammate Josh van der Flier in the starting line-up.

For O'Brien it is the first time for years under both Joe Schmidt and his predecessor Declan Kidney that he has not made the squad when fully fit.

Only two years ago he was one of the standout players in the drawn series between the British & Irish Lions and world champions New Zealand.

"Josh van der Flier has had less time than Sean and has not let us down so it is a perfect opportunity to put him back in there he is very keen and raring to go," Schmidt said.

Coincidentally the 32-year-

old known as the 'Tullow Tank' for his bullocking runs - who would have many more than 55 caps to his name but for a series of injuries - will join up with Kidney at English side London Irish next season.

Van der Flier is one of six changes to the scrum Schmidt has made from the unimpressive 26-16 win over Italy a fortnight ago.

South Africa-born No 8 CJ Stander returns after recovering from the fractured cheekbone and eye socket he suffered in the opening defeat by England which ended their hopes of successive Grand Slams.

Grizzled hooker Rory Best returns as expected to captain the side - fellow veteran Cian Healy starts too in place of Dave Kilcoyne - whilst the second row sees the proven duo of Iain Henderson and James Ryan replace Ultan Dillane and Quinn Roux.

Schmidt -- who is taking

charge of his penultimate Six Nations match as he steps down after the World Cup later this year - has made one alteration to the backs bringing back the fit again Garry Ringrose to partner Bundee Aki.

"It will be hard to say goodbye we have had some great occasions at Lansdowne Road over the years," he said.

"I mentioned it to my wife yesterday that it would be my final Six Nations home game."

Schmidt has resisted the temptation to bring in a fit again Kieran Marmion on the replacements bench despite his impressive performance at scrum-half last November in the historic home win over New Zealand.

The Irish still entertain outside hopes of retaining their title after beating Scotland and the Italians - which could come down to their final match against Wales who are unbeaten ahead of their clash on Saturday with Scotland.

"We have not been as cohesive as we would like to be in our first three matches but we are hoping we have a great performance on Sunday," the coach said yesterday.

They must overcome a French side who arrive having beaten Scotland last time out giving a much-needed boost to their battered confidence following a hammering by England at Twickenham.

## TEAM (15-1)

Rob Kearney; Keith Earls, Garry Ringrose, Bundee Aki, Jacob Stockdale; Johnny Sexton, Conor Murray; CJ Stander, Josh van der Flier, Peter O'Mahony; James Ryan, Iain Henderson; Tadhg Furlong, Rory Best (capt), Cian Healy

REPLACEMENTS: Niall Scannell, David Kilcoyne, John Ryan, Ultan Dillane, Jack Conan, John Cooney, Jack Carty, Jordan Larmour  
Coach: Joe Schmidt (NZL).



EQUESTRIAN

# Beerbaum leads Chiara 222 to victory at CHI Al Shaqab

Guerdat clinches the 1.50m CSI5\* class aboard Hannah at Al Shaqab

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Veteran rider Ludger Beerbaum won the feature event on the second day of the CHI Al Shaqab equestrian championship at Al Shaqab yesterday. Under lights, the German piloted his 16-year-old Chiara 222 to victory to conquer the 1.60m class.

Seven combinations qualified for the Jump-Off but only three produced a double clear round. First to go was Belgium's Pieter Devos with his 11-year-old Claire Z but the pair jumped down two rails. Deusser followed with Calisto Blue and produced a clear round.

Later, Beerbaum beat Deusser's time with over two seconds, taking a commanding victory as he came home with Chiara 222 in 43.74secs. Dutch Jur Vrieling finished runner-up in the saddle of VDL Glasgow vh Merelsnest NOP in a time of 44.72secs to push Deusser to third spot. Simon Delestre with Filou Carlo Zimequest came second, while Devos completed the top five.

"My horse, Chiara 222, has been doing this for 16 years and has a lot of experience here at Al Shaqab itself. She loves it here and I think that counted in my favour. I'm very happy with the result. I'd like to enjoy this moment, but I'm also looking forward to the Grand Prix." A delighted Beerbaum, who took home in €48,345 prize money, said.

Earlier, Steve Guerdat clinched the 1.50m CSI5\* class aboard Hannah. Guerdat galloped to victory with his 12-year-old Belgian Warmblood-mare as the pair stopped the clock in 67.26 seconds. Sweden's Henrik von Eckermann came close but had to be content with second placed after coming home

in 67.63 seconds with his 9-year-old gelding Que Bueno de Hus. The third place went to Norway's Geir Gulliksen, who guided VDL Groep Quatro to finish line in 70.82secs

Guerdat said: "It was nice to win. It was a nice class. I was quite lucky that a lot of riders were faster than me but had one down. So, I did not have to take too many risks. I managed to save a little bit of my horse's energy for the Grand Prix and still win a class. It was good for me. I've been to Al Shaqab many times before. The facilities are great. It's very good for the horses, and the ground is good. The organization is perfect."

In the Dressage CDI 5\* Grand Prix earlier in the day, a display of elegance, poise, and style clinched first place for Minna Telde from Switzerland. Telde and her gelding, Isac, achieved the victory with a total points haul of 71.543.

Excited about her win, Telde said: "It's amazing! I'm so thrilled that Isac performed well in this arena where he had shown some tension earlier. But he adapted. He stayed serene and did well and for that I am very grateful. This is my second time at Al Shaqab. The arena is amazing, the stables are very nice and so are the surfaces for the horses - it's all very horse-friendly."

The day's activities started with participants in the Para Dressage competition demonstrating their riding skills based on their grades of disability. Grade 1 winner Katja Karjalainen of Finland, riding Dr Doolittle, was overjoyed with her victory, which was achieved with a personal record performance. "I was surprised to come out on top, and of course very happy. It went very well. Al Shaqab is a very cool venue. Everything is easy to find, and this is very important to me as I'm visually impaired."



Germany's Ludger Beerbaum astride 16-year-old Chiara 222 gallops to victory in the 1.60m class at CHI Al Shaqab at Al Shaqab arena yesterday.



Belgium riders pose after their victory in the CPEDI3\* Para-Dressage Team competition.



Minna Telde of Sweden celebrates after winning the Dressage CDI 5\* Grand Prix title at Al Shaqab.

## DAY TWO RESULTS

### CSI5\* TABLE A WITH JUMP-OFF 1.60M

1. Rider: Ludger Beerbaum (GER); Horse: Chiara 222; Faults: 0; Time: 43.74secs; Jump-Off: Faults: 0; Time: 43.74secs; Prize: €48,345
2. Jur Vrieling (NED); VDL Glasgow vh Merelsnest N.O.P.; 0; 79.31secs; 0; 44.72secs; €29,300
3. Daniel Deusser (GER); Calisto Blue; 0; 77.90secs; 0; 45.83secs; €21,975

### CSI5\* TABLE A (238.2.1) 1.50M

1. Rider: Steve Guerdat (SUI); Horse: Hannah; Faults: 0; Time: 67.26secs; Prize: €12,625
2. Henrik von Eckermann; Que Bueno de Hus Z; 0; 67.63secs; €10,100
3. Geir Gullikson (NOR); VDL Groep Quatro; 0; 70.82secs; €7,575

### DRESSAGE CDI5\* GRAND PRIX

1. Rider: Minna Telde (SWE); Horse: Isac; Total Points: 71.543; Prize: €6,250
2. Danielle Heijkoop (NED); Badari; 70.804; €5,000
3. Henri Ruoste (FIN); Rossetti; 70.522; €3,750

### PARA-DRESSAGE CPEDI3\* INDIVIDUAL I

1. Rider: Katja Karjalainen (FIN); Horse: Dr Doolittle; Total Points: 74.940; Prize: €660

### PARA-DRESSAGE TEAM

1. Belgium (Ciska Vermeulen/Rohmeo; Kevin van Ham/Eros van ons Heem; Manon Claeys/San Dior 2; Barbara Minneci/Stuart); Total Points: 418,738
2. Netherlands (Nicole den Dulk/Wallace N.O.P./Lotte; Krijnsen/Zarienta; Demi Haerkens/Dude; Frank Hosmar/Guetta; 407,930)
3. Ireland (Tasmin Addison/Farenheit; Michael Murphy/Rohan; Rosemary Jean Gaffney/Bink; Kate Herr-Horan/Serafina T); 382,212

### CPEDI3\* INDIVIDUAL II

1. Julie Payne (GBR); Pandora; 69.853; €660
2. Nicole den Dulk (NED); Wallace N.O.P.; 66.324; €500

### CPEDI3\* INDIVIDUAL III

1. Annemarieke Roling - Nobel (NED); Doo Schufro; 68.775; €600
2. Barbara Minneci (BEL); Stuart; 67.353; €500

### CPEDI3\* INDIVIDUAL IV

1. Rodolpho Riskalla (BRA); Don Henrique; 71.626; €600
2. Philippa Johnson-Dwyer; Lord Louis; 71.016; €500
3. Manon Claeys (BEL); San Dior 2; 69.878; €400

### CPEDI3\* INDIVIDUAL V

1. Ciska Vermeulen (BEL); Rohmeo; 70.357; €660
2. Franks Hosmar (NED); Guetta; 70.238; €500
3. Kevin van Ham (BEL); Eros Van Ons Heem; 69.325; €400

### HATHAB MEDIUM TOUR - ACCUMULATOR + JOKER 1.20/1.30M

1. Rider: Achraf Oualla (MAR); Horse: Dino Bb Z; Points: 65; Time: 48.47secs; Prize: QR5,000
2. Jaber Rashid al Amri (QAT); Canavaro de Muze (E.T.); 65; 49.77secs; QR4,000
3. Saeed Nasser al Qadi (QAT); Daydreamer EC; 65; 49.99secs; QR3,000

### HATHAB SMALL TOUR - F&T 1.00/1.15M

1. Rider: Ghanim Nasser al Qadi; Horse: Fudine; Faults: 0; Time: 60.26secs; Prize: QR2,500
2. Mohammed Saeed Haidan; Ziezo; 0; 62.20secs; QR2,000
3. Nasser al Ghazali; What A Pleasure; 0; 62.53secs; QR1,500

FOCUS

## Formula One set to introduce point for fastest lap

Reuters  
London

Formula One is set to tweak the scoring system this season by awarding an extra point to the driver setting the fastest race lap. An informed source told Reuters the outcome of an e-vote of the Formula One commission was expected on Monday and the change written into the regulations in time for next week's opening race in Melbourne.

The move has been approved already by the governing FIA's World Motor Sport Council, although not mentioned in a statement of decisions taken on Thursday. Final approval is expected to be a formality.

The extra point would be available only if the driver setting the fastest lap also finished in the top 10 scoring positions. Formula One awarded a point for the fastest lap over the first decade of its existence as a world championship from 1950-59. That made all the difference in 1958, when Mike Hawthorn won the title for Ferrari to become the first British world champion.

Hawthorn won only one race to compatriot Stirling Moss's four but had five fastest laps to his rival's three. Only the six best results of the season counted towards a driver's points tally and only the top five drivers scored. Without the fastest laps being taken into ac-

count the pair would have been tied on 38 points but four of Hawthorn's were in races that counted. Moss also famously asked stewards to reinstate his disqualified rival to second place at the Portuguese Grand Prix, a sporting gesture that cost him the championship but that he never regretted.

In modern times, Brazilian Felipe Massa would have been 2008 champion for Ferrari instead of Lewis Hamilton for McLaren on fastest laps.

They finished just a point apart after a nail-biting final race in Brazil but Massa had three fastest laps to Hamilton's one, although strategy would doubtless have changed had an extra point also been available then.

OLYMPICS

## Paris 2024 rejects pleas by karate and squash

AFP  
Lausanne

The International Olympic Committee yesterday quashed the hopes of karate and squash which had kept lobbying for inclusion in the 2024 Games even after Paris organisers had announced its roster. In a rejuvenating overhaul, Paris 2024 announced in February that it would include breakdancing, climbing, surfing and skateboarding.

There should be 28 sports with 319 events on the 2024 list, with the four candidate sports yet to be rubber stamped. Karate officials, whose sport has been included on the 2020 Tokyo roster,

Paris 2024 announced in February that it would include breakdancing, climbing, surfing and skateboarding

were in Paris this week to try and persuade a change of heart.

Squash partisans are also planning to continue their campaign for inclusion. However Kit McConnell, head of sports at IOC, said it was too late for additional candidates. "Once the original proposal is made, it's over," the New Zealander McConnell said. "The process was clear: we have explained that the IOC could not add any more sports. But we can cut one of the sports," he said. "The proposal will be discussed during the meeting of the executive commission. And if the session approves the recommendation, these sports will be

provisionally approved. The final decision will be made in December 2020," he added.

### THAILAND BARS LIFTERS FROM OLYMPICS

Thailand is barring its weightlifters from the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and all other international competitions, the association overseeing the sport said yesterday, after several athletes tested positive for doping. The International Weightlifting Federation has vowed to clean up a sport that has grappled with rampant steroid use. The eight Thai cases date to last year's championships in Turkmenistan and were detected in follow-up analysis after initial rounds of tests. In response the Thai Amateur Weightlifting Association said it was launching an investigation and "will not send athletes to compete at the international level" until the sit-

uation is resolved. That includes the Tokyo Games and qualifying rounds, the association added, citing the importance of protecting its "honour and dignity".

It did not name those targeted in the probe. Thailand will however hold on to its role as host of the 2019 IWF world championships in September. No Thai athletes will take part. The IWF president vowed last year to beat the doping scourge tainting the sport, but the task is daunting.

A raft of Olympic champions were stripped of medals and records following re-analysis of samples from the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Games. Nine countries, including Asian powerhouse China, were suspended as a result. As a result tough new measures have been introduced to punish serial doping offenders and limit their ability to take part in the Olympics.



Newly-elected Federation Internationale de Motocyclisme (FIM) President Jorge Viegas, Qatar Motor and Motorcycling Federation President Abdulrahman al-Mannai, Dorna CEO Carmelo Ezpeleta and other FIM officials pose after a press conference at the Losail International Circuit yesterday.

## MOTORCYCLING/VISITQATAR GRAND PRIX

# Marquez sets lap record to sound warning to rivals

A belter of an FP2 session sets us up nicely for the first Saturday of the season

Defending champion Marc Marquez (Repsol Honda Team) set a blistering pace in the second Free Practice session at the VisitQatar Grand Prix to lead the way yesterday, his 1:53.380 three tenths under the previous lap record as the Spaniard bettered second place Maverick Viñales (Monster Energy Yamaha MotoGP) by 0.474, with Jack Miller (Alma Pramac Racing) completing the top three.

After the start was slightly delayed due to track conditions, it was a manic second session for the premier class as the time attacks came in, with the later time giving the riders the best chance to book an automatic Q2 place for today's qualifying. It was Marquez who set the fastest lap of the weekend with just over five minutes of FP2 gone, setting the tone for the rest of the session.

Rookie Joan Mir (Team Suzuki Ecstar) was the first to put the soft-soft tyre combination in and the 2017 Moto3 World Champion set the timing screens alight to go over three-tenths clear of the field with just under 15 minutes to go.

Miller then took over at the top a couple of minutes later on board his GP19, before Franco Morbidelli (Petronas Yamaha SRT) produced the



goods to fire himself to the summit – this coming after he had crashed at Turn 1 earlier in FP2, with his bike catching fire in the gravel. Andrea Dovizioso (Mission Winnow Ducati) then took over but shadowing Viñales, a prowling Marquez would have the last laugh to go 0.474 clear of the Yamaha rider to set a new outright lap record around the Losail International Circuit.

Viñales and Miller kept P2

### FREE PRACTICE 2 RESULTS

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Marc Marquez (ESP) Honda Time: 1:53.380 seconds | 6. Andrea Dovizioso (ITA) Ducati Team +0.876s            |
| 2. Maverick Viñales (ESP) Monster Yamaha +0.474s   | 7. Franco Morbidelli (ITA) Petronas Yamaha SRT +0.895s   |
| 3. Jack Miller (AUS) Pramac Ducati +0.528s         | 8. Alex Rins (ESP) Suzuki Ecstar +0.940s                 |
| 4. Danilo Petrucci (ITA) Ducati Team +0.673s       | 9. Aleix Espargaro (ESP) Factory Aprilia Gresini +0.987s |
| 5. Fabio Quartararo (FRA) Petronas Yamaha +0.774s  | 10. Joan Mir (ESP) Suzuki Ecstar +1.022s                 |

and P3, with Danilo Petrucci (Mission Winnow Ducati) 0.673 back in fourth. Rookie Fabio Quartararo (Petronas Yamaha SRT) had a great session, the Frenchman rounding out the top five to easily get himself a provisional Q2 place, with Dovizioso eventually settling for P6. Morbidelli ends Friday in seventh, with Alex Rins (Team Suzuki Ecstar) jumping into the top ten on his final lap with a 1:54.320. Aleix Espargaro (Aprilia Racing Team Gresini) and Mir sit P9 and P10 respectively after strong sessions.

There are some big names missing from the top ten, and as things stand will have to go through Q1 in order to fight for pole. Jorge Lorenzo (Repsol Honda Team) ends P11 after finishing P2 in FP1, Cal Crutchlow (LCR Honda Castrol) sits just behind teammate Takaaki Nakagami (LCR Honda Idemitsu) in P13 and P12 respectively, with FP1 leader Valentino Rossi's (Monster Energy Yamaha MotoGP) 1:55.048 only good enough for P16 at the end of the day – 'The Doctor' the only rider to not improve his time in FP2.

A belter of an FP2 session sets us up nicely for the first Saturday of the season. Will anyone be able to improve in FP3? We will know today afternoon.

## SPOTLIGHT

# FIM boss visits Qatar Motorsports Academy

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Federation Internationale de Motocyclisme (FIM) President Jorge Viegas visited the Qatar Motorsports Academy (QMA) yesterday, on the sidelines of the opening round of the MotoGP at the Losail International Circuit.

Viegas, who was elected as the motorcycle body's new chief last December, was given a tour of QMA facility by Losail Circuit Sports Club (LCSC) vice-president and general manager Khalid al-Remaihi and Qatar Motor and Motorcycling Federation President Abdulrahman al-Mannai.

Viegas was impressed by the steps taken by LCSC and QMMF to nurture young talent in Qatar and was confident that world class riders will come out of the academy.

LCSC, Dorna Sports and Aspire Academy joined forces to launch the QMA during the WorldSBK championship in November last year. The main objective of the academy is to give young riders, between the

age group of 8 and 16, the tools to learn the basics of motorcycle racing and improve their skills in a safe environment. Former MotoGP and WorldSBK rider Jose Luis Cardoso is QMA's motorcycle head.

When the admissions were opened late last year, LCSC was overwhelmed by the response to the academy with more than 200 children showing interest.

QMA is providing both theoretical and practical lessons for all types of tracks with experienced instructors leading them. For all-round development of the riders, the academy is also educating them on physical preparation and nutrition.

The training facility conducts two classes per week of 2.5 hours each. During these classes, the students perform an array of technical, reaction speed and agility exercises on a variety of adapted circuits. Classes are being held on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday.

Riders, who have been identified as being more advanced, are trained one additional day per week in the hope of further developing their skills.



FIM President Jorge Viegas (left) with Qatar Motor and Motorcycling Federation President Abdulrahman al-Mannai (centre) and Losail Circuit Sports Club vice-president and general manager Khalid al-Remaihi during his visit to the Qatar Motorsports Academy yesterday.

## INITIATIVE

# Angel Nieto Team launched in Qatar

The 2019 MotoGP World Championship fires into life this weekend and the Angel Nieto Team heads into the new season with extra force thanks to a new partnership with Sama Global Investment.

The partnership was officially announced in Doha, in front of an illustrious audience including the Minister of Culture and Sports, HE Salah bin Ghanem bin Nasser al-Ali, as well as Sama Global Investment President Abdullah al-Mutawaa and Carmelo Ezpeleta, CEO of Dorna Sports.

Integrity, teamwork, passion and respect are the values shared between the Angel Nieto Team and Sama Global, who are ready to embark on a new adventure together that will see Albert Arenas and Raul Fernandez compete in the Moto3 class, with Jake Dixon and Xavi Cardelus on board in Moto2.

The team will also contest the inaugural FIM Enel MotoE World Cup, a new series for electric motorcycles that will feature Angel Nieto Team riders Nico Terol –

the 125cc World Champion in 2011 – and the only female rider in the paddock in Maria Herrera.

Jorge Martinez "Aspar," the CEO Sama Qatar Angel Nieto Team, said: "The Sama Qatar Angel Nieto Team has two clear objectives: to be World Champions once more and to develop young riders for World Championship competition."

"Today we have presented a new partnership that is born through a blend of different cultures, aimed at bringing the best out of each other to achieve success. Sama Global Investment have welcomed us with open arms and we want to repay the faith they have shown in us with some great results!"

Abdulla al-Mutawaa, Chairman Sama Global Investment, said: "Sama Global Investment is excited to partner with Angel Nieto Team and support their goal of becoming World Champions. Sama Global Investment is keen to support and enhance Qatar's vision to become a centre of sports in the world."

## BOTTOMLINE

# Ageless wonder Rossi roars into the 40s

By Sahana Bidappa  
Doha

Valentino Rossi left everyone in splits on more than one occasion during the press conference ahead of MotoGP's season-opener in Qatar. Seated next to 19-year-old Fabio Quartararo, Rossi was asked the inevitable question – whether he feels old sitting next to the rookie, with the Frenchman becoming just the third rider to start a full MotoGP season as a teenager.

Rossi, who turned 40 last month, now finds himself racing against a rider less than half his age. And the Italian saw a funny side to things. "We speak now exactly about this, I said that he could be my son!" "He's very, very young. (Born in) 1999, so it means that he's also two years younger than my brother (Luca Marini) and already in MotoGP," added the Italian legend.

Rossi is into his 24th Grand Prix season and there is no sign of him hanging up his helmet yet. While his longevity, love and dedication for the sport are unparalleled, he is without doubt past his prime with the Italian's age re-



Yamaha MotoGP's Valentino Rossi of Italy (L) and Petronas Yamaha SRT's Fabio Quartararo attend a press conference at Losail International Circuit. The 19-year-old Quartararo is 21 years younger than Rossi, who turned 40 last month.

flecting in his recent results.

All but four of his 24 years in MotoGP have been in the premier class, where Rossi has claimed seven championship titles and holds the all-time win record of 89 victories. But as he enters final stretch of his career, not many give him a chance to become a world champion again. Some even doubt that he will win a Grand Prix race again.

Rossi finished a close third at Losail International Circuit last year, but – for the first time with Yamaha – didn't win a race all season. In fact, the last time Rossi stood on the top of the podium was 20-months ago at Assen.

Despite pre-season struggle of Yamaha, Rossi topped the opening practice session of the season yesterday at Losail Circuit. But under the lights in the second practice, he dropped to 17th and was the only rider not to improve in the second session, leaving him 16th on combined times.

"And I hope to be there, I hope to be strong. Yamaha worked hard during the winter and we hope to be stronger than last year," said Rossi before he took the bike out for practice yesterday.

"Under some points of view our bike has improved, but I think that we still have something

to improve for sure. It's true also that on the last day of the test there were a lot of Yamahas in the top seven, so I think we are strong with the new tyres, but after we need to see what happens in the race during 22 laps," he added.

With Marquez and his teammate showing more pace than last year, Rossi wasn't sure of much success tomorrow.

"It's difficult to say because in the last years here (Qatar) I did good results. Apart from one victory I was on the podium a lot of times, so we have to try. But if I have to think now, maybe we have seven or eight riders ready for the podium. I don't know if we are stronger here than last year because anyway it was a good race. But we'll see, we have to try. Also try to understand the conditions, with the grip, with the wind, we'll see..." he said.

Rossi says the 2019 Yamaha bike is a step forward and very fast over a single lap but remains concerned about race pace. "The pre-season tests were very important. Both in Sepang and in Qatar we've taken steps forward and we can say that we've done positive tests. We still have to improve a lot, but the road we're on is the right one."