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PREVIEW

Al Sadd and Rayyan aim to improve positions

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Less than a week after being crowned Qatar's league champions for the 14th time, Al Sadd will turn their focus to the continental stage when they take on Uzbek giants Pakhtakor in a Group D match of the AFC Champions League in Tashkent today.

Al Sadd thrashed Al Ahli 7-2 to wrap up the QNB Stars League title with one match to spare, but Pakhtakor are expected to provide a totally different challenge to the 2011 Asian Champions who will be playing in front of a hostile crowd in the Uzbek capital.

The Wolves, who reached the semi-finals last year, are currently third in the standings in Group D, having opened their campaign with a 2-0 defeat against Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia before beating Iran's Persepolis 1-0.

Pakhtakor top the standings with four points from two points, while Saudi's Al Ahli are second on three points, above Al Sadd on goal difference. Iran's Persepolis are at the bottom with just



Al Sadd captain Xavi leads a training session in Tashkent yesterday. Al Sadd will take on Uzbek giants Pakhtakor in the Uzbek capital today.

The Wolves, who reached the semi-finals last year, are currently third in the standings in Group D, having opened their campaign with a 2-0 defeat against Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia before beating Iran's Persepolis 1-0

one point from their two games.

Al Sadd are on a high and that confidence should help them stand in good stead in Tashkent. The squad includes Meshaal Barsham, Pedro Miguel, Jung Woo-Young, Xavi Hernandez, Ali Asad, Hassan al-Haydous, Baghdad Bounedjah, Hamed Ismail, Tarek Salman, Boualem Khoukhi and Akram Afif.

"The league win is firmly behind us. We are now totally focused on our game against Pakhtakor," Al Sadd coach Jesualdo Ferreira said at his pre-match press conference.

"Everybody knows Pakhtakor are one of the leading sides in the continent and we will have to be our best to beat them," the Portuguese national added.

First-choice goalkeeper Saad al-Dossari and left-back Abdulkarim Hassan, the best player in Asia, will be missing in action as they are recovering

from injuries. However, the return of Xavi from an injury layoff adds strength to the side.

Meanwhile, Qatar's Al Rayyan will look to make it back-to-back home wins when they host the United Arab Emirates' Al Wahda today in Group B at the Jassim bin Hamad Stadium.

Goals from Lucca and Gelmin Rivas helped the Qatari side come from behind to claim a 2-1 victory over Uzbekistan's PFC Lokomotiv on Matchday Two as they rebounded strongly from an opening-day defeat to Al Ittihad.

The hosts go into the game on the back of a 2-2 draw against Al Sailiya in the Qatar Stars League at the end of last week and they currently sit fourth in the standings.

Leonardo scored twice as Al Wahda secured an impressive 4-1 victory over Al Ittihad four weeks ago to ensure all four teams in Group B are on three points going into the third round of fixtures.

Like their opponents, Al Wahda also drew their last league game, with a 1-1 draw against Al Dhafra on Thursday leaving them sixth in the UAE Pro League.

FOOTBALL/AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Duhail blow two-goal lead to share spoils with Al Ain

Despite controlling two-thirds of possession throughout, the Qatari side were profligate in front of goal

AFC
Doha

A thrilling display of attacking football saw Al Duhail of Qatar and United Arab Emirates' Al Ain play out a 2-2 draw at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium on Matchday Three of the 2019 AFC Champions League Group C yesterday.

Despite controlling two-thirds of possession throughout, the Qatari side were profligate in front of goal. Al Ain goalkeeper Khaled Eisa was on top

form, helping his side limit the damage at the back while their front line took two of the three chances that came their way.

Al Duhail got off to a flying start with Edmilson forcing Eisa into a reflex save within just three minutes of the start. The Brazilian received a cross-field pass and cut inside onto his left before firing low, but Eisa dived to parry the ball away.

Right-back Mohamed Mousa followed suit minutes later with a drilled effort from 30 yards out, but Eisa was again live to the threat.

The UAE international was left with little to do in the ninth minute as Al Duhail captain Karim Boudiaf struck the opener. Edmilson was again the dangerman down the right wing, finding space and crossing for Boudiaf who hit on the half-volley from the edge of the box to put the hosts in front.

Al Duhail's dominance continued and Rui Faria's men were able to double their lead in the 32nd minute through Youssef El Arabi.

Musa exchanged a quick one-two with Boudiaf to free himself down the right flank before sending a low cross

for El Arabi who swept home his fourth goal in three matches against Al Ain.

The home fans' joy was cut short though as Al Ain responded instantly through Jamal Maroof. Eisa's long ball was nodded on by Tongo Doumbia into the path of Maroof who coolly slotted home to half the deficit just three minutes after Al Duhail's second goal.

Making his first appearance this campaign after returning from injury, the 2019 AFC Asian Cup MVP and top scorer Almoze Ali thought he had made it 3-1 just before the break when he controlled Edmilson's cross and ap-

plied the finish from six yards out, but Eisa produced a superb save to deny the striker and keep the margin at one goal.

After the restart, Al Ain were a revitalised side, pressing higher up and creating opportunities. They were rewarded with a penalty kick in the 53rd minute after Maroof was brought down inside the box by Musa.

Caio stepped up to take the penalty but goalkeeper Amine Lecomte picked the right side and made the save before Amer Abdulrahman skied the rebound. The Al Duhail goalkeeper turned

from hero to zero for the home crowd within two minutes after he spilled an attempt to handle Maroof's cross and Marcus Berg punished him, stabbing in the equaliser in the 58th minute.

The home crowd thought their side had won the tie at the death when El Arabi rose high to head Ali Afif's cross from a free-kick in the last minute of added time, but Eisa produced yet another top drawer save to keep the scores level at 2-2 at the final whistle.

The two sides meet again at Hazza bin Zayed Stadium in Al Ain in two weeks' time on Matchday Four.



Al Duhail's Karim Boudiaf is congratulated by teammates after he scored the team's first goal against Al Ain yesterday. At right Youssef El Arabi (9) celebrates his goal with Mohamed Mousa. PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Liverpool 'on fire' as they chase double: Klopp

'People with a proper idea about football didn't want to have Porto'



Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp and Virgil van Dijk (also inset) celebrate after the win over Southampton on Friday. Liverpool have largely coped without injured Joe Gomez thanks to Virgil van Dijk's towering presence at the heart of a much-improved defence (Reuters)

AFP
Liverpool

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp says his players are revelling in the pressure to win every game as they chase a Premier League and Champions League double.

Klopp's men host Porto in the first leg of their European quarter-final tie today after scoring late winners to beat Fulham, Tottenham and Southampton to edge two points ahead of Manchester City in a titanic title race. City still have a game in hand on Liverpool, meaning the title remains in the English champions' hands, and there is precious little room for error for the Reds in their remaining five league games.

But Klopp believes being in the running to win both competitions is inspiring his squad not to give up late in games.

"It's such a good time. We get up every morning and the weather is good as well which is pretty rare. It's warm outside, spring is coming and we are in the two big competitions, but we have to use the situation," he said on Monday.

"We have not finished the season, we have not finished our development.

"We want to write a few proper things on the pages of that season book. We are on fire to be honest, you can see it in training, but other teams as well. We all play for a lot."

After squeezing through a difficult group containing Paris Saint-Germain and Napoli on

goals scored and overcoming German giants Bayern Munich in the last 16, Porto were seen as a softer draw in the last eight.

Liverpool thrashed the Portuguese side 5-0 in last season's Champions League last 16, but Klopp said the tie is tougher than it seems.

"People around said so many things, 'you want Porto'; they only look at numbers and names, stuff like that.

"People with a proper idea about football didn't want to have Porto, that's the truth. But nobody wanted Liverpool as well by the way."

Klopp will be forced into a change at left-back, with Andy Robertson suspended, while Joe Gomez will not be rushed back into action despite returning to training after a lower leg fracture.

Liverpool have largely coped without Gomez thanks to Virgil van Dijk's towering presence at the heart of a much-improved defence.

And the Dutchman believes he and his teammates will be able to hold their heads high even if they fall short of ending a 29-year wait to win the Premier League due to City's brilliance.

"Everyone is dreaming of it and the unlucky bit for us is another team in the league has been amazing as well," said Van Dijk.

"For the neutral Premier League watcher it is great viewing, it is nice to see two good teams challenging for the title.

"Hopefully it can be something great at the end of the season, but we can hold our heads up very high."

FOCUS

Son hopes new stadium boost will be a factor against Man City

Reuters
London

Tottenham Hotspur forward Son Heung-min hopes Manchester City's players have underestimated the beneficial effect the club's new stadium will have on his team mates in the Champions League quarter-final, first leg today.

The long-delayed new 62,062-seater arena finally hosted a Premier League game last week when Tottenham beat Crystal Palace 2-0 on an historic night for the club.

South Korean Son scored the opening goal that evening and expects the noise-levels to be cranked up a notch on Tuesday when Pep Guardiola's quadruple-chasing side arrive for the first of three clashes in 10 days between the teams.

City's Kevin de Bruyne poured cold water over any concerns his team mates might have over visiting what is now London's biggest club stadium – complete with a 17,500 capacity single-tier South Stand that promises to be a wall of sound.

De Bruyne said it would be just like playing at Tottenham's adopted home Wembley – where City won earlier this season.

But Son says it will be an advantage for Spurs.

"Of course, of course," the South Korean told reporters, when asked if playing at the new ground would help Tottenham achieve a result to give them hope of a semi-final berth.

"We'll take these plus points. I don't think maybe the City players realise, because they have always been playing at home, but we've been nearly two years away from our home stadium.

"What we have done in the two years is very positive but we missed home a lot and maybe we can show them tomorrow night."

With City in relentless form, winning 21 of their last 23 matches in all competitions, they are firm favourites to avoid a repeat of last year's quarter-final defeat by Liverpool.

CITY QUALITY

Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino, who will almost certainly be without midfielders Eric Dier and Erik Lamela today, described the game as one of the biggest matches of his managerial career.

He is all too aware of the quality in City's ranks.

"The first thing we need to do tomorrow is to run, because Davis Silva, Kevin de Bruyne, Raheem Sterling, (Gabriel) Jesus and Sergio Aguero, the first thing they do before they start to play is to run, to press, they fight for every single ball," Pochettino told reporters.



Tottenham's Son Heung-min (foreground) takes part in a training session on the eve of their UEFA Champions League match against Manchester City in London yesterday. (Reuters)

City can handle atmosphere at Tottenham's new home: De Bruyne

Reuters
London

Much has been made of Tottenham Hotspur's new stadium but Manchester City midfielder Kevin De Bruyne says his side have no fears about playing there when the clubs meet in the first leg of their Champions League quarter-final.

"I don't care about the stadium," the Belgium international told reporters ahead of City's first visit to the new 62,062-seater venue today. "I care about the team we play. Everybody talks about the stadium like it's something special. Everybody has a stadium, everybody has supporters. They'll be up for it, they'll probably be a little bit more excited, but in the end it's a stadium with supporters. I

don't think there will be any difference."

City are second in the Premier League, two points behind Liverpool but having played a game less, and reached the final of the FA Cup after beating Brighton and Hove Albion 1-0 on Saturday.

Having already won the League Cup this season, City are still on track for a quadruple but De Bruyne says there is "no point thinking about it".

AGUERO IN CONTENTION

Manchester City striker Sergio Aguero has shaken off a muscle injury and could return to action in today's Champions League quarter-final first leg against Tottenham Hotspur, manager Pep Guardiola said yesterday. "He trained with the team for the first time and he feels better," Guardiola told a news conference.



Manchester City's players take part in a training session at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London yesterday. (AFP)

"Manchester City's strength is not the quality, of course they have the quality, but first of all they have the desire, the will to fight, and to match every opponent.

"Then because they have unbelievable quality they can win more games."

Tottenham will be playing in only their second Champions League quarter-final, having lost 5-0 on aggregate to Real Madrid in 2011.

"It's a massive bonus for us,"

Pochettino, whose side looked down and out after earning only one point from their opening three group games, told reporters.

"I think its going to be a very tough game. We'll start the game very aggressively. We want to be aggressive.

"We can't guess what the atmosphere will be like, it's only our second game there. But we hope and wish that the atmosphere is going to be amazing and tough for our opposition."

SPOTLIGHT

Indispensable Pique returns 'home' to Old Trafford with Barca

Reuters
Barcelona

All eyes will be on strike duo Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez as Barcelona visit Manchester United in the Champions League this week, but defensive lynchpin Gerard Pique is proving equally important to the Catalans' treble bid.

The centre back returns to Old Trafford for the first time since he left Manchester United in 2008 to rejoin Barcelona, in Wednesday's quarter-final first leg.

Joining the Red Devils in 2004 from Barcelona as a 16-year-old, Pique learned important lessons during some tough seasons in the north of England.

The defender never managed

to secure a regular starting spot, with Rio Ferdinand and Nemanja Vidic ahead of him, but was surrounded by elite players to glean wisdom from.

However, after a harrowing afternoon at Bolton Wanderers in 2007 where Pique made a mistake which handed Nicolas Anelka an easy goal, the defender lost the confidence of then-coach Alex Ferguson.

He negotiated a passage back to Barcelona, perhaps the first sign that he would later turn into an entrepreneur as well as an elite footballer.

"I arrived at Manchester United a boy, and I left a man," Pique said in a *Player's Tribune* article.

"I walked into (Ferguson's) office, and I was honest with him. I said, 'Listen, I feel like I've lost your trust. Barcelona is my

home. I want to go back. I hope you will let me go."

Pique returned to Barcelona for 5mn euros (\$5.62mn) as a reserve with low expectations, but by the end of his first season under Pep Guardiola he had become a key player in the 2008-09 treble-winning side.

There have been ups and downs since, but seven La Liga titles, three Champions League wins and multiple other trophies decorate his honours list, as well as the 2010 World Cup victory with Spain.

Pique has been in sublime form this campaign, driving his side towards another league title, although the trophy the squad wants to win most is the Champions League.

With coach Ernesto Valverde resting the 32-year-old for the first time all season in Spain's top

flight, Barcelona shipped four goals in a 4-4 draw with Villarreal last week.

The defender returned to shut out Atletico Madrid in a 2-0 win on Saturday that left Barca 11 points clear with seven matches remaining and attention now turning to Old Trafford.

"I'm coming back to my second home," wrote Pique on Twitter after the Champions League draw in March pitted Barcelona and United together.

Pique united United in Barcelona's 2-0 Champions League final win in Rome in 2009 and is aiming to pull off the same trick again on Wednesday.

With Suarez and Messi in scintillating form up front, the hosts may need to try and out-score Barcelona, but they will find the man they let go so cheaply standing in their way.



Barcelona's Gerard Pique (centre) congratulates teammate Lionel Messi (left) after the latter scored against Atletico Madrid in Barcelona on Saturday. (AFP)

FOCUS

Sterling says more must speak out against racism

City forward feels playing on can provide the adequate riposte instead of walking off

Reuters
London

Manchester City's London-born forward Raheem Sterling has said more players need to speak out when they suffer racism if the problem is to be eradicated from the game, but disagreed with the proposal of walking off the pitch in response.

Sterling has earned widespread support for his stand on the subject in the wake of racist abuse he encountered during England's Euro 2020 qualifier in Montenegro.

Earlier this season, he also accused sections of the British media of fuelling the problem with a negative portrayal of young black players.

"I don't think I'm trying to make a difference, or making a difference," Sterling told reporters ahead of Manchester City's Champions League quarter-final first leg at Tottenham Hotspur today.

"It's about speaking about what you have experienced and some people have probably shied away from that.

"If more players speak up then the better it will be."

However, when asked if he would support walking off the pitch in response to any abuse, as several Premier League managers have recently backed, Sterling said it would be better to stay on and let football provide the adequate riposte.

"I wouldn't personally agree with it (walking off), because I think to go out and win the game would hurt them even more. Score a goal or win the match, that's a better feeling, that beats them," he added.

Tottenham defender Danny Rose, who was also subjected to racial abuse in Montenegro,



In this March 25, 2019, picture, England's Danny Rose (left) vies for the ball with Montenegro's Adam Marusic during their Euro 2020 qualifier in Podgorica, Montenegro. Rose, who was also subjected to racial abuse in Montenegro, said he "could not wait to leave football". (Reuters)

said last week he "could not wait to leave football" after becoming frustrated with the way the authorities are dealing with the problem.

"I respect his comments and it's a shame to hear that," Sterling said. "It's a shame to hear that really.

"For someone like him — and not everyone can take it the same way — it's not a nice thing to hear."

Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino was asked whether

he had spoken to Rose about his comments.

"It's a very delicate situation, it's not easy, it's very personal how you manage your emotion," Pochettino said.

"We're here trying to help him and everyone that can feel that emotion of being abused. It's a thing that we are of course fighting all together to try to stop."

BEYOND FOOTBALL

Pochettino said the issue was nothing new and that it was a

problem that reached beyond football, even if the likes of Rose and Sterling had brought it into the spotlight.

"It's a thing in our society that we need to fight and be against all together to stop that happening again," he said.

"It's not only that Danny suffered the other day with Sterling and different people. It happens with people in the street and you and me, we don't know about it and maybe they suffer more than the people we know.

"With Danny and Sterling of course we're very sorry for them but they have the capacity and the power because they're famous people who can denounce it. How many people on the outside cannot say anything, only can go home and cry?"

Tottenham's South Korean forward Son Heung-min has also been a target for abuse and said players must fight together.

"We should just protect the player who gets racism and fight all together," Son said.

LIGUE 1

PSG miss chance to wrap up title

AFF
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain squandered the chance to clinch the Ligue 1 title in record-equalling time after being held to a 2-2 draw at home by Strasbourg on Sunday.

PSG were handed the opportunity to win their sixth French crown in seven seasons after second-placed Lille drew 1-1 at Reims earlier.

That left Thomas Tuchel's side knowing that three points at the Parc des Princes would see them retain the title and wrap it up with eight games to spare, matching the speed with which Laurent Blanc's team became champions in 2016.

Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting gave them an early lead, and it looked as though the home side would get the job done despite Kylian Mbappe being left on the bench at kick-off and Neymar, Edinson Cavani and Angel Di Maria all missing out due to injury.

However, Strasbourg came into this game fresh from winning the League Cup last week-

end and they fought back to lead before half-time with Nuno Da Costa turning in a Lionel Carole cross to equalise and Anthony Goncalves lashing home from 22 yards to make it 2-1 in the 36th minute.

Mbappe came off the bench on the hour mark but it was another substitute who made it 2-2 with eight minutes remaining. Julian Draxler sent in a corner from the right and Germany defender Thilo Kehrer headed home.

However, having drawn at home to PSG back in December, mid-table Strasbourg then held on for a point.

A huge 20 points clear at the summit and with a game in hand, PSG will now hope to secure the eighth league title in their history when they go to Lille next weekend.

A point will be enough in that game, but PSG should have finished the job here — Choupo-Moting somehow managed to turn a net-bound Christopher Nkunku shot onto the post in the first half in one of the worst misses you are ever likely to see, and Dani Alves hit the bar after the break.



PSG's Eric Choupo-Moting (right) misses out on scoring a goal against Strasbourg during the Ligue 1 match in Paris on Sunday. (AFP)

Napoli draw puts Juventus coronation on hold

AFF
Milan

Napoli drew 1-1 with ten-man Genoa on Sunday to ensure that Juventus will have to wait another week to seal an eighth consecutive Serie A title.

The champions have a 20-point advantage on second-placed Napoli, who they have beaten in both their head-to-head clashes, with seven games to go.

Juventus, who beat AC Milan 2-1 on Saturday, needed Napoli to lose to win the Scudetto for the 35th time, ahead of their Champions League quarter-final first leg against Ajax next week.

A draw next weekend at lowly SPAL would be enough for Massimiliano Allegri's side to win the title which would be the first in Italy for Cristiano Ronaldo. Despite their numerical advantage, Napoli struggled to contain the visitors who inflicted the

only league defeat this season on Juventus last month. Genoa went a man down when Stefano Sturaro was sent off on 28 minutes following a VAR review for a diving studs-up tackle on Allan.

Dries Mertens blasted in the opener on 34 minutes, but Darko Lazovic pulled Genoa level just before the break. Genoa goalkeeper Ionut Radu ensured his 14th-placed side went away with a point with a string of fine saves including two late on Mertens and Kalidou Koulibaly.

"It was an unexpected performance that makes an alarm bell ring, if we play like this in London, then we're in trouble," said Napoli coach Carlo Ancelotti ahead of next week's Europa League game against Arsenal.

"We absolutely must wake up, demonstrate the value and potential that this group has and find our true identity. "Luckily we have four days to fix things."

US women rout Belgium in World Cup tune-up

Reuters
Los Angeles

The United States women's national team pumped in four first half goals en route to a 6-0 romp against Belgium in a one-sided friendly as the reigning World Cup champions continue to build momentum ahead of their title defence in France in June. Carli Lloyd opened their account with

a leaping header off a long pass from Tierna Davidson that found the bottom corner of the goal in the 14th minute. Five minutes later, the veteran midfielder unleashed another header to a nearly identical spot in the net to send the nearly 21,000 fans at the Banc of California Stadium in Los Angeles into a frenzy on a warm Southern California night.

"I know who I am. I know what I'm capable of," Lloyd, who was making her

first start this year, told reporters after the match.

Forward Lindsey Horan nodded in a goal off a corner kick past diving Belgian goalkeeper Nicky Evrard in the 26th minute and midfielder Samantha Mewis effectively put the game out of Belgium's reach with a header to put the hosts 4-0 ahead.

Forward Alex Morgan came on as a substitute to start the second half and scored two minutes later when she

broke free of her defender, took a pass from Lloyd, and chipped a shot over Evrard's head for her 101st career goal.

Forward Jessica McDonald completed the rout with a header off a set-piece move in the 90th minute as the team improved to 4-1-2 in 2019.

The match was the last for the US before the team selects its World Cup roster, which will look to bring the team home its fourth title.

INTERVIEW

Phelan's study of success helps United on road back to glory

Reuters
Burnley, England

When Mike Phelan was asked if he would like to return to Manchester United and assist Ole Gunnar Solskjaer in turning the club around after the sacking of Jose Mourinho in December, he barely paused for thought before agreeing.

Having enjoyed plenty of success at Old Trafford as Alex Ferguson's trusted right-hand man, the chance to return after a six year absence was not an opportunity the 56-year-old was going to let pass.

But while that was an instant decision, there had been plenty of contemplation during his time away from the club.

"I had a time of reflection. I felt that I needed to look back and examine the processes that were in place. Because you just don't get the time when you are actually 'in it'," he told Reuters at his East Lancashire home.

Phelan wanted to look back to find out exactly how United had enjoyed such dominance and conversations with Ferguson and former United CEO David Gill formed part of that process.

But after a brief spell as manager of Hull City in the 2016-17 season, with the club poorly resourced and heading for relegation, Phelan took time away from the game and decided to extend that investigation of leadership skills.

"I thought I needed to find out more. I am quite an open-minded sort of fella and the more people you meet, the more areas of expertise you venture into, you find yourself searching for that common denominator," he said.

Phelan talked to people in rugby and other sports and looked at American coaching and management methods as well as the world of business.

"What I found was that the simplicity in most things tends to be the most effective. We are all looking for the secret ingredient but when you start to talk to people at the elite level, the top

end, you find they do the simple things better than most people," added the former United player.

COLLABORATION

As Phelan describes the conclusions he reached, it is also evident they have been put into practice at United since December.

"The (leaders) communicate better and they actually hand over the reigns to people to get on with their jobs. You bring people into your environment, you communicate well, you express your thought process and then you hand it over and see what comes back," he said.

A look at the technical area during games reveals that approach in action. Solskjaer is in charge but Phelan frequently is out on the touch-line guiding players and the other coaches, Michael Carrick and Kieran McKenna, are also part of the collaboration.

"I like the idea of sharing, seeing people grow, (then) the end product," he says.

Still, Phelan has been surprised how quickly Solskjaer was able to change the mood at the



In this March 30, 2019, picture, Manchester United assistant coach Mike Phelan (left) talks to manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer during the EPL match against Watford at Old Trafford in Manchester. (Reuters)

club, bringing back a sense of enjoyment. "It was an instant response," he says, noting the way that Solskjaer created a "breath of fresh air" around the club's Carrington training complex.

SCOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT

The challenge, now that the

Norwegian has been appointed the long-term manager, is to turn that 'bounce' into a more substantial improvement. Phelan believes they are helped by having players who still have plenty of scope for improvement, none more so than Paul Pogba.

Pogba looked unhappy and

unsettled during the latter period of Mourinho's time at the club but has shone since the change.

"I think that happened to quite a few players, they probably drew into themselves a little bit and were very cautious," says Phelan. "Paul had a spell where all the eyes were on him and delivery of his best wasn't there all the time, the consistency.

"Now we are trying to apply ourselves to Paul's game. Ole has done a terrific job at helping Paul through certain spells and he has embraced that. He is maturing all the time.

"He is not the finished deal even though everyone looks at him and sees a World Cup winner already but he is not the finished deal, there is still a lot more to come and that is the exciting bit about United.

"There are players there who haven't achieved for the club what they need to achieve and we want to make sure that they relish that experience, embrace the opportunity to win things at Manchester United."

Another of those players is left back Luke Shaw, who has significantly improved in recent months.

"I think that there is more to come from Luke — he is young, he is energetic and he has an attitude which is developing all the time. We feel that the world is his oyster... he is a huge player," says Phelan.

GLORY DAYS

With United facing Barcelona in a Champions League quarter-final first leg tomorrow, there is the sense of the club being on the right path to rediscovering their glory days.

Phelan certainly doesn't feel the past is a weight on the club nor has that success reduced his own personal hunger.

"I want these players to enjoy their own great moments for themselves but I also want to do it again — that is the drive," he said.

"It is different this time around, of course it is. It was six years ago, but it is not impossible, definitely not impossible."

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Rahul, Mayank star in Kings XI's victory over Hyderabad

'The way we bowled I am pretty happy given the dew. Still there are areas in our bowling we can improve. We were 20 runs short but what we all did believe in ourselves'

IAN S
Mohali

Kings XI Punjab made heavy weather of an easy run-chase but in the end rode stylish half centuries from KL Rahul and Mayank Agarwal to edge-past Sunrisers Hyderabad by six wickets in a thrilling Indian Premier League encounter yesterday.

Auditioning for a berth in the World Cup squad, opener Rahul remained not out at 71 off 53 balls to notch up his third half-century of the season with the help of seven fours and one six as good friend Agarwal (55; 43 balls; 3x4; 3x6) matched him with equal gusto.

Chasing a modest 151 for victory, the pair added 114 runs for the second wicket after the hosts lost Chris Gayle (16) early to a Rashid Khan (1/20) delivery which the southpaw tried to hit for a six, getting caught by Deepak Hooda at long on.

It was all Rahul-Agarwal show from there on, as the Karnataka pair paced their innings to perfection and played some delightful shots down the ground. While Rahul brought up his fifty in 34 balls, Agarwal took 40 deliveries to get there.

Agarwal - who was dropped by Yusuf Pathan on 40 - held out to Vijay Shankar at deep midwicket off Sandeep Sharma (2/21) in the 18th over.

But just when it looked like the damage had already been done, David Miller (1) and Man-deep Singh (2) threw their wickets away to Sandeep in the same over and Siddarth Kaul in the 19th to leave the game on the edge with 11 runs needed in the final over.

Mohamed Nabi gave just five runs away from the first three balls before Rahul hit a magnificent straight drive for four to then score the winning runs off a David Warner misfield as Punjab won with one ball to spare, putting up 151/4 in 19.5 overs.

Earlier, Warner struck an unbeaten half-century but Punjab bowlers put in a disciplined



Kings XI Punjab batsman K L Rahul (right) plays a shot as Sunrisers Hyderabad wicket-keeper Johnny Bairstow looks on during the 2019 Indian Premier League match at the Punjab Cricket Association Stadium in Mohali yesterday. (AFP)

effort to restrict Sunrisers to 150/4 after skipper R. Ashwin asked them to bat first. In-form Warner brought up his third IPL fifty of the season as he scored an unbeaten 70 (62 balls, 4x6, 6x1), but it was an uncharacteristic knock where the destructive Australian left-hander struggled with timing as he carried his bat through the innings.

In the last two overs, Sunrisers managed 26 runs to up the ante with Deepak Hooda (14*) hitting Mohammed Shami (1/30) for 15 runs in the final over, including two fours and a six.

Warner joined hands with Manish Pandey (19) for a 55-run fourth wicket partnership but it never really took off. Asked to bat first, the visitors lost Jonny Bairstow (1) early, as the England stumper-batsman flicked Mujeeb Ur Rahman (1/34) to Ravichandran Ashwin at short mid-wicket who took a smart catch.

It took Warner 15 balls to hit his first boundary in the fifth over when the southpaw punched an overpitched Ankit Rajpoot delivery past the diving mid-on fielder.

Warner and Shankar (26) la-

boured to a 49-run stand for the second wicket as Sunrisers trudged to 50/1 at the halfway stage.

Shankar lost his wicket just after that, trying to guide a Ashwin (1/30) carrom ball towards third man and feathering it to wicketkeeper K.L. Rahul in the process. Nabi (12) was run out by Ashwin off his own bowling as Sunrisers could only get to 92/3 after 15 overs.

Pandey and Warner then tried their best to get some runs but it was only after the latter got out that Hyderabad accel-

ated to get to 150-run mark. "The way we bowled I am pretty happy given the dew. Still there are areas in our bowling we can improve. We were 20 runs short but what we all did believe in ourselves," SRH captain Bhuvneshwar said.

BRIEF SCORES
Sunrisers Hyderabad: 150/4 (David Warner 70 not out; Ravichandran Ashwin 1/30; Mohamed Shami 1/30; **Kings XI Punjab** 151/4 K.L. Rahul 71 not out, Mayank Agarwal 55; Sandeep Sharma 2/21)

SPOTLIGHT

Lynn gets lucky after another IPL bail fail

Reuters
Mumbai

Australian Chris Lynn was tempted to visit a casino to cash in on his luck after a miraculous reprieve while batting during Kolkata Knight Riders' Indian Premier League (IPL) victory over Rajasthan Royals on Sunday.

The 28-year-old was on 13 when he inside-edged a delivery from paceman Dhawan Kulkarni onto his stumps and started walking off without bothering to look behind.

Kulkarni was celebrating too but it was soon cut short when the bowler realised that the ball had lit up the zing ball but failed to dislodge it, ricocheting off the leg stump to the fine-leg boundary for a four instead.

Lynn went on to score 50 off 32 deliveries in Kolkata's successful eight-wicket win chasing Rajasthan's 139-3 that put them at the top of the IPL table with four wins from five matches.

"I always like to ride my luck," Lynn told teammate Harry Gurney in a video posted on the IPL website.

"I inside-edged it, and then I heard a second noise. I thought (the wicket-keeper) might

catch it or the balls might come off, but I got lucky.

"I might actually go the casino tonight!"

It was the third time in this year's IPL that a batsman had benefited from the balls refusing to be dislodged.

Rajasthan were also on the receiving end in an earlier match when Jofra Archer's delivery rolled onto the stumps but Chennai Super Kings captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni, yet to open his account, survived as bails could not be dislodged.

Dhoni, who went on to make a match-winning 75 off 46 deliveries, suffered the heartbreak himself on Saturday when bails did not fall despite his direct hit with Punjab opener Lokesh Rahul short of his ground.

Rajasthan captain Ajinkya Rahane appeared as bewildered as the bowler and was involved in a long conversation with the on-field umpire after Sunday's incident.

"The rules are what they are, but I told the umpire, at least don't declare it a boundary," Rahane said.

"It's already so tough for the bowlers in T20, and in such a situation, a ball can, maybe, declared a dead ball. That was my conversation with the umpires."



Kolkata Knight Riders Chris Lynn plays a shot against Rajasthan Royals at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur Sunday. (AFP)

South Africa Women's World Cup cricketer dies in double tragedy

Former South Africa Women's World Cup cricketer Eriessa Theunissen-Fourie and her child were killed in a car crash this weekend, police confirmed Sunday. The fatal accident occurred in the northwestern mining town of Stilfontein, a police spokesman told AFP. All-rounder Theunissen-Fourie, 25, represented South Africa in four international - three ODIs and one Twenty20 - and was part of the 2013 World Cup squad. "This is a dreadful tragedy in

the true sense of that word," said Cricket South Africa (CSA) chief executive Tabang Moore. "This is devastating news for all of us.

"Eriessa did so much for the community in which she lived and gave excellent service both as a national player and in the work she did at grassroots level.

"On behalf of the CSA family, I extend our deepest sympathy to her husband, her family, friends and all her cricketing colleagues."

WORLD CUP

Hot English summer to aid subcontinent teams: KP

Reuters
Mumbai

The English weather will play a major role during the World Cup and teams from the Indian subcontinent stand to gain if hot and dry conditions prevail during the May 30 - July 14 tournament, former captain **Kevin Pietersen** has said.

England, which last hosted the quadrennial showpiece in 1999, has witnessed more batsmen-friendly conditions in recent past with scores of 300 regularly posted in one-day internationals held in the country. A hot English summer will translate into dry pitches on which the batsmen and spinners from the subcontinent teams are expected to thrive.

"It is going to be weather dependent," Pietersen told reporters in Mumbai at a promotional event last week.

"Last year was one of the most beautiful English summers since 1976. It was the hottest summer recorded in the UK with hardly any rain at all, conditions were extremely dry. If the conditions are like they were last summer, then I think the subcontinent teams are going to have a massive role to play in the World Cup.

"If they are not and it's horrible and green and seaming, then it's going to play in England's favour and the team that copes best in those circumstances?"

While many see it as England's best chance to win their maiden 50-overs World Cup, India will also be among the favourites.

Led by Virat Kohli, the two-time champions have more or less a settled batting line-up even though they continue to search for a reliable number four in the batting order.

Opener Rohit Sharma agreed the English conditions could have a big say on their team selection.



"I think we are pretty much settled. There are a few spots which everyone know about," Rohit, Kohli's deputy in limited-overs formats, said.

"It all depends on what the captain, coach and selectors think about the combination. Whether we need to go with the extra seamer, extra middle order batsman, extra opening batsman or an extra spinner.

"The conditions in England will matter the

most. The last time when we were there the conditions were really dry. I don't know if it will be the same again. If it is like that then we need to get an extra spinner, as simple as that. If it's not then we should probably get an extra seamer."

All 10 participating teams will have to submit their 15-member squads by April 23, while injury replacements can be named until May 23.

India selectors to pick WC squad on April 15

The national selectors led by M.S.K. Prasad will meet on April 15 in Mumbai to pick the squad for the 2019 World Cup in England, starting May 30. India are considered one of the favourites going into this edition of the World Cup.

The cut-off date is April 23 and the selectors have been waiting to watch the performance of some of the players in the ongoing Indian Premier League considering that the position of the number four batsman and the fourth fast bowler is still up for grabs. Speaking to IANS, a senior BCCI official said that the selectors wanted to wait a bit before finalising the squad and the ongoing IPL held them to take a look at some of the players who are in the radar to fill a couple of spots.

"The selectors wanted to take it easy as they had time till April 23 to send in the squad for the World Cup. With the IPL on, it always helps to see how some of the boys are playing," the official explained.

While most of the players pick themselves, Ambati Rayudu and Rishabh Pant are the two main contenders for the No.4 slot in the batting department. While Rayudu has flattered to deceive in this edition of the IPL, Pant has shown his brilliance in flashes. But his inability to finish games has been something that pundits have spoken about time and again in this IPL. Vijay Shankar is another player who could be looked at as an option considering that he has been looking to bat up in the order for Sunrisers Hyderabad in this IPL.

The fourth pacer's slot is something that the selectors will be sweating over as someone like a Navdeep Saini has been very impressive in the IPL for Royal Challengers Bangalore. Skipper Virat Kohli and coach Ravi Shastri's

input will definitely be asked for before a final decision is made.

IPL FINAL VENUE DECISION AFTER CHECKING WITH CHENNAI

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has decided that a call on whether Chennai will get to host the final of the 12th edition of the Indian Premier League will be taken after discussing the issue with the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA).

The closure of the three stands at the Chepauk Stadium is the cause for concern as otherwise the rule of the tournament says that the defending champion gets to host the opening game as well the final.

The Supreme Court-appointed Committee of Administrators met in the capital yesterday, but a decision was not reached.

Members of the board will have an interaction with TNCA officials before taking a call on whether Chennai hosts the coveted final or the hosting right is given to Hyderabad as they were runners-up last year.

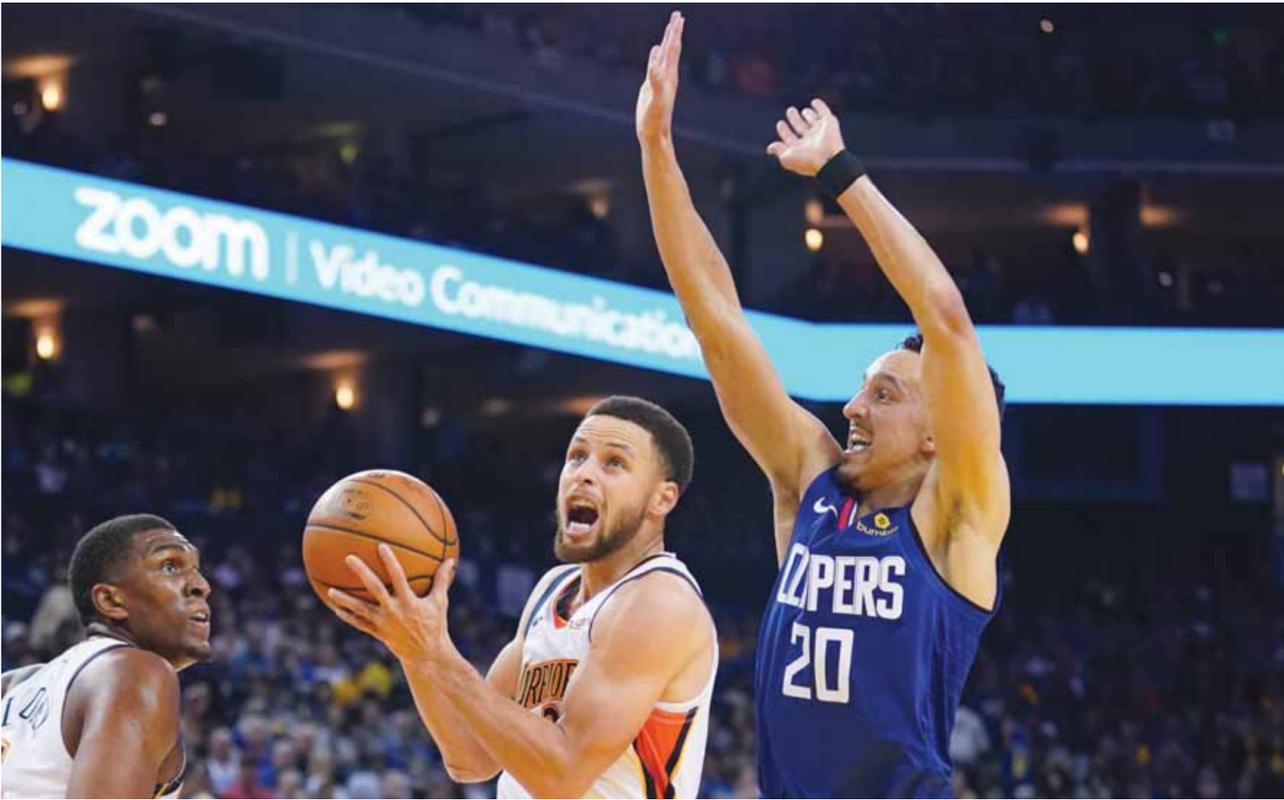
Speaking to IANS, a senior BCCI official said that it was important to speak to TNCA before a call is taken on the matter.

"It is important to meet the TNCA officials since Chennai should be the venue for the finals in the ordinary course. The BCCI-IPL must also make all efforts to speak with the local authorities to ensure the requisite permissions are granted in order for the cricket loving public of Chennai to witness the IPL final," the official said. Last year Chennai lost on hosting Chennai Super Kings' home games after the Cauvery water dispute saw their home games being shifted to Pune.

NBA

Warriors clinch top seed, Rockets set record for threes

'Let me just say that for 47 years, Warriors fans have stuck with us through thick and thin'



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry shoots the basketball against LA Clippers guard Landry Shamet (right) during the third quarter at Oracle Arena. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

AFP
Los Angeles

The Golden State Warriors clinched the Western Conference's top seed with a victory in their final regular-season contest at the Oracle Arena, beating the Los Angeles Clippers 131-104 on Sunday.

Stephen Curry led the charge with 27 points and Kevin Durant added 16 as the Warriors won their fifth straight game.

They wore throwback "We Believe" jerseys in a move designed to honour the past at Oracle, which has been their home venue for 47 years. The team is moving across the bay from Oakland to a facility in San Francisco where they will play next season. "Let me just say that for 47 years, Warriors fans have stuck with us through thick and thin," Kerr told the crowd moments after the final buzzer. "Let's be honest, most of those years have been a little thin."

The win gives them home field advantage throughout the West playoffs.

The Warriors' first-round opponent, which will be the eighth seed in the West,

is yet to be determined. There is a chance it could be the Clippers when the playoffs begin next Saturday. They are battling Oklahoma City (47-33) and San Antonio (47-34) - both won on Sunday - for the sixth, seventh and eighth playoff spots in the West.

Elsewhere, the Houston Rockets continued their three-point assault on the NBA as they drained a record 27 from beyond the arc in a 149-113 win over the Phoenix Suns. The Rockets broke their own league single-game record with the help of 30 points from James Harden.

It came just five days after they tied the mark, initially set against the Los Angeles Lakers in January, with 26 against the Sacramento Kings. They now have four of the top 10 three-point games.

The Rockets made 27 of 57 threes and seven players hit at least two threes, including Eric Gordon who had a career-high eight, Harden who had five, and P.J. Tucker with four. Austin Rivers broke the record with 69 seconds remaining after Gary Clark had tied it two minutes earlier.

Elsewhere, the Miami Heat edged closer to being eliminated from the playoffs for the second time in three seasons on

RESULTS

Orlando	116-108	Boston
New York	113-110	Washington
Lakers	113-109	Utah
Portland	115-108	Denver
New Orleans	133-129	Sacramento
Houston	149-113	Phoenix
Milwaukee	115-107	Atlanta
Golden State	131-104	Clippers
Dallas	129-127	Memphis
Brooklyn	108-96	Indiana
Charlotte	104-91	Detroit
San Antonio	112-90	Cleveland
Oklahoma City	132-126	Minnesota
Toronto	117-109	Miami

Sunday after a 117-109 defeat to the Toronto Raptors. Miami entered the game with their destiny still in their own hands, knowing that victories in their three final regular season fixtures would carry them into the postseason. But an agonising loss - they were leading by 13 at one point in the

first half - means Miami were now sweating on results elsewhere to have any chance of progressing. Sunday's loss left Miami with 38 wins and 42 defeats for the season. Miami icon Dwyane Wade, who could grace an NBA court for the last time when the regular season draws to a close on Wednesday, finished with 21 points.

In Minnesota, Russell Westbrook and Paul George combined for 54 points and Dennis Schroder had 14 in the fourth quarter in Oklahoma City Thunder's 132-126 victory over the Timberwolves.

Westbrook added 10 rebounds and 15 assists for his 32nd triple-double of the season as the Thunder remained a half-game ahead of San Antonio for seventh place in the Western Conference.

"That's just what he does," said Timberwolves guard Josh Okogie, who was given the unenviable task of guarding Westbrook. "He has great teammates around him that can make plays. He's a playmaker himself. He's aggressive, rebounds and can get to the rim." Karl-Anthony Towns led Minnesota with 35 points, while Andrew Wiggins scored 24 and Dario Saric added 23.

NFL

Steelers' Juju slams ex-teammate Brown

Reuters
New York

The Pittsburgh Steelers' former franchise receiver took a Twitter swipe at the team's new franchise receiver on Sunday.

The Steelers' newest top wideout is not pleased, and not staying quiet. Nearly a month after the Steelers traded seven-time Pro Bowl wideout Antonio Brown to the Oakland Raiders after a contentious few months, including his absence from the team's season finale, Brown sparked a Twitter spat with ex-teammate Juju Smith-Schuster when commenting on a fan post on social media.

Brown had been tagged on a posted image with the header touting the 22-year-old Smith-Schuster as the Steelers' 2018 team MVP. Brown's Twitter response blamed Smith-Schuster for his crucial fumble late in a Week 16 loss at New Orleans, saying he "fumbled the whole post season in the biggest game of year."

Smith-Schuster caught wind of the post and tweeted, "Keep your emotions off the internet," followed by a series of tweets referencing Brown.

"All I ever did was show that man love and respect from the moment I got to the league," Smith-Schuster tweeted. "I was genuinely happy for him too when he got traded to Oakland with a big contract, and now he takes shots at me on social media?"

Smith-Schuster continued, tweeting, "Crazy how big that ego got to be to take shots at people who show you love!"

Smith-Schuster then posted a quote from famous author Mark Twain that read, "Never argue with a fool. Onlookers may not be able to tell the difference." Brown, 30, and Smith-Schuster were

Pittsburgh teammates for the younger wideout's first two NFL seasons in 2017-18.

Publicly, Smith-Schuster has supported Brown, but he has also voiced strong support for Brown's former quarterback, Ben Roethlisberger. Brown and Roethlisberger reportedly had a practice dispute heading into the Steelers' Week 17 game against Cincinnati. That apparent argument devolved into Brown missing the Steelers' final game, despite their playoff fates being on the line.

Surrounding his trade to Oakland in March, Brown has often referenced his problems with Roethlisberger's leadership style. Last month, Smith-Schuster publicly backed his quarterback amid the controversy, saying, "I was so blessed to enter the league and play with a Hall of Fame QB as a 20-year old. Ben has taught me so much, he's a true Leader and I can't wait to rock with my guy this season."

Brown tweeted the next day, "Do not listen to any NFL player who haven't got paid yet! They will do and say anything to make sure they going to get paid even if it's compromising integrity or anything! sad but true."

In late January, Smith-Schuster appeared on ESPN's First Take and said the Steelers needed to limit off-field drama and distractions, comparing the team to a family of reality TV stars.

"I think everyone just needs to stop being divas," Smith-Schuster said. "I think we need to stop being the Kardashians and just play ball!"

While the wideout wouldn't offer names at the time when asked about which teammates he might be referring to, he said only, "I've learned a lot in that locker room, and I know that I would never want to be a problem to any franchise."



Juju Smith-Schuster (left) and Antonio Brown.

Sabres fire Housley as playoff drought continues

Phil Housley became the second NHL coach fired on Sunday as the Buffalo Sabres cut ties with the coach after two seasons.

The Florida Panthers fired Bob Boughner, also after two seasons, earlier in the day. General manager Jason Botterill was expected to discuss the decision at an afternoon press conference. Housley, 55, went 58-84-

22 during his tenure with Buffalo, where he played for the first eight seasons of his 21-year career.

He was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2015 as a player.

The Sabres finished their season with a 71 rout of the Detroit Red Wings on Saturday, but failed to reach the playoffs for the eighth straight season.

MLB

Sanchez homers three times as Yankees pound Orioles

Reuters
Baltimore

Gary Sanchez homered three times while Clint Frazier homered twice as the visiting New York Yankees belted seven homers in defeat of the Baltimore Orioles 15-3 on Sunday afternoon.

Sanchez finished with six RBI in his first career three-homer game while Frazier drove in four runs. The victory completed a sweep of the three-game series. New York also got homers from Gleyber Torres and Austin Romine and finished with 14 overall during this sweep. The first 18 runs the Yankees scored in this series came via the long ball. New York now has won three straight.

Domingo German (2-0) carried a no-hitter into the sixth inning and gave up two runs on two hits in six innings plus two batters.

Baltimore got off to a surprising 4-1 start on the season but have dropped four straight. David Hess (1-1) threw 6 1/3 no-hit innings in his first start, in Toronto, but gave up four runs in five innings in this game.

On Sunday, the Yankees took the lead with two runs in the second inning and two more in the third, thanks to their power. Torres and Frazier both hit solo shots in the second inning. Sanchez added a two-run homer in the third for a 4-0 lead. Frazier made it 5-0 with an RBI single in the sixth. New York then scored four times in the seventh. Sanchez got

RESULTS

Yankees	15-3	Orioles
Angels	7-2	Rangers
Dodgers	12-6	Rockies
Brewers	4-2	Cubs
Astros	9-8	Athletics
Red Sox	1-0	Diamondbacks
Braves	4-3	Marlins
Nationals	12-9	Mets
Cardinals	4-1	Padres
Rays	3-0	Giants
Phillies	2-1	Twins
Tigers	3-1	Royals
Mariners	12-5	White Sox

it started with his second two-run homer of the afternoon to give the Yankees a 7-0 edge. Later in the inning, DJ LeMahieu (double) and Gio Urshela (single) each added RBI hits to push the lead to 9-0.

Baltimore scored three in the seventh but missed a chance at more when Chris Davis got called out on strikes with two runners on base. He finished the day 0-for-4 and is now 0-for-23 this season and, going back to 2018, 0-for-44. Sanchez added his final two-run homer in the eighth before Frazier and Romine both did the same thing in the ninth for the 15-3 lead. Romine's shot came

off of infielder Hanser Alberto, who came in to pitch during that frame.

TROUT HOMERS YET AGAIN AS ANGELS TOP RANGERS

Mike Trout homered in his fourth consecutive game, and the Los Angeles Angels scored seven unanswered runs in a 7-2 victory over the Texas Rangers on Sunday afternoon in Anaheim Calif. It was the Angels' third win in a row after dropping the first game of the four-game series to the Rangers. The Rangers certainly will be happy to avoid facing Trout for a while, after the Angels centre fielder destroyed Texas pitching throughout the series. In the four games, Trout hit five home runs, drove in nine, and reached base in 13 of 18 plate appearances (6-for-11, six walks).

For the season, Trout is hitting .393 with a .581 on-base percentage and 1.000 slugging percentage. Texas took a 2-0 lead in the second inning against Angels starter Chris Stratton on Joey Gallo's two-run homer, his fourth of the season. But the Angels got the runs back and more in the bottom of the inning against Rangers starter Shelby Miller (0-1).

In the inning, the Angels had two hits, three walks (including an intentional walk to Trout), and a hit batter that led to four runs and 4-2 lead. Jonathan Lucroy drove in one run with an infield single, Zack Cozart drove in one when he was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded, David Fletcher had an RBI single and Tommy La Stella had an RBI groundout.



New York Yankees catcher Gary Sanchez hits a two-run home run during the third inning against the Baltimore Orioles at Oriole Park at Camden Yards. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports



SPOTLIGHT

Save the Dream in focus on International Day of Sport

'I wish to congratulate Save the Dream and its partners for taking the initiative of this forum and for creating an opportunity for debate, exchange and inspiration on how to break down walls through peaceful means such as sport'



A group picture of the International Youth Conference for Peace and Development participants.



A group picture after the conclusion of the Peace Walk at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.

In a tribute to the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and on the occasion of the International Day on Sport for Development and Peace, Save the Dream, in partnership with the International Olympic Truce Center (IOTC) held an international youth forum 'When Sport Breaks Down Walls' with the support of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and Qatar Airways, official airline of the event.

The forum was hosted at Der Diwan, Arab Culture House in Berlin under the patronage of Sheikh Saoud Abdulrahman al-Thani, ambassador of the State of Qatar in Germany who opened the event jointly with Mohamed Hanzab, ICSS Chairman and Founder of Save the Dream and a message from FIFA Secretary-General Fatma Samba Diouf Samoura.

The event was attended, among

the others, by Wilfried Lemke, former United Nations secretary-general's special adviser on Sport for Development and Peace, Tegla Loroupe, marathon champion, UN and Save the Dream Sport Ambassador, captain of the Refugee Olympic Team at the 2016 Summer Olympics, Constantinos Filis, Director-General of the International Olympic Truce Center (IOTC), Kjetil Siem, General Secretary of the FIFA Foundation, Honey Thalji, Corporate Communications Manager, FIFA, Save the Dream Ambassador, and Patrick Hausding, German diver, Olympic medalist.

The forum highlighted several examples of sport diplomacy, some of which were shared by the same persons involved, such as Hans Grodzki, East German long-distance runner who competed for the United Team of Germany in the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome.

Over 80 youth leaders, from across the globe, gathered to support the positive message of unity within society while focusing on the power of sport to inspire and empower people across nations, regardless of faith and socio-economic status.

Delivering the welcome message, Sheikh Saoud Abdulrahman al-Thani, ambassador of the State of Qatar in Germany said: "There have been many moments, in the history, when the universal language of sport has spoken to the world, and when sport has broken walls among nations and in the minds of people. I wish to congratulate Save the Dream and its partners, particularly the International Olympic Truce Center, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and Qatar Airways, for taking the initiative of this forum and for creating an opportunity for debate, exchange and in-

spiration on how to break down walls through peaceful means such as sport."

Mohamed Hanzab, ICSS Chairman and Founder of Save the Dream said: "Sport breaks down all walls starting with those built in the minds of some people. Today, we look to you as 'Agents of Change' - young leaders who can promote, through sport, a new way of thinking, one grounded in the values of integrity, respect and inclusion. We are happy to be a part of this movement towards making a social change with sport driving towards a better future"

During his intervention, Constantinos Filis, Director General of the International Olympic Truce Center (IOTC) said: "We believe in the power of the young generation. As we believe in the power of sport to change our perception of the other and learn to respect diversity. Our strong

co-operation with Save the Dream aims at bringing young leaders from different backgrounds together and teach them how to disseminate the message of peace in their respective communities."

Speaking of the role of sport for peace talks, Wilfried Lemke, former United Nations secretary-general's special adviser on Sport for Development and Peace, said: "We should not work with violence, hate, walls and sanctions. We must respect each other, our customs and our history. We should have friendship all over the world."

Fatma Samoura, secretary-general of FIFA, pointed: "Fighting for equality and promoting diversity is a moral choice and a commitment that we must make together as a society, and sport, not least football, is a unifier we must use to breakdown social barriers and heal divisions."

Save the Dream Sport Ambassadors Tegla Loroupe, marathon champion, captain of the Refugee Olympic Team at the 2016 Summer Olympics, and Honey Thalji, Corporate Communications Manager, FIFA, respectively said: "Highlighting the power of sport for unity and peace, we organised, on the eve of the forum, a peace walk from Brandenburg Gate to Checkpoint Charlie, the Berlin Wall crossing point between East Berlin and West Berlin during the Cold War. We will keep walking and running for all those affected by walls and promote the use of sport to build bridges among individuals and nations."

"If we believe in something, we can make it happen. If we care, we can make a big difference. Sports gives us self-esteem, self-confidence. I wanted a story about the celebration of

life and I find it in football"

Massimiliano Montanari, Executive Director at Save the Dream concluded, "Since the Wall of Berlin came down in 1989, so many new walls have been built all around the world. In tribute to the 30th Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall, we celebrate today, 6th of April, the International Day on Sport for Development and Peace, trusting sport will break down the next wall. Sportpersons are architects of peace who do not build walls but bridges."

The Youth Forum pledged its support to the #WhiteCard campaign promoted by the Monaco-based foundation "Sport and Peace" and launched a long-term global advocacy initiative to raise awareness on the role of sport to break down the walls which still exist despite the demolition of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

TENNIS

Muguruza retains Monterrey title as injured Azarenka retires

Reuters
Madrid

Spain's Garbine Muguruza successfully defended her Monterrey Open title on Sunday when Victoria Azarenka retired injured from her first WTA singles final in three years.

Second seed Muguruza was leading the match between the two former world number ones 6-1 3-1 when Azarenka decided she was unable to continue because of an injury to her right leg.

"It's unfortunate I couldn't give my best today, but I tried my hardest," a tearful Azarenka, who had not previously reached final since the birth of her first child in December 2016, said at the presentation.

"I want to say thank you to my son Leo, who is not with me here. I would love him to be here to share this with me because it is special."

The crowd responded with a chant of "Vika! Vika! Vika!"

Muguruza's victory never looked in doubt and ensured that the record run of different women winning WTA titles this season would be extended to 16 tournaments.

The former French Open and Wimbledon champion broke the painless Belarusian three times in the first set and again in the fourth game of the second.

"It's a great feeling to come back and defend a title," Muguruza said in a courtside interview. "It's never easy."

Azarenka received treatment on her leg during a medical timeout between sets, but it became apparent as the second set began that her movement had become significantly hampered.



Spain's Garbine Muguruza celebrates with the trophy after winning the Monterrey Open. (Reuters)

Keys defeats Wozniacki for first time to claim Charleston title

Madison Keys overpowered Caroline Wozniacki 7-6(5) 6-3 to win the Charleston Open and defeat the former world number one for the first time on Sunday. The win, her first on clay court, broke a nearly two-year drought for the eighth seeded American, who claimed her fourth career title. Her previous two losses to Denmark's Wozniacki had been on hard courts when Keys failed to win a set.

"I think I served really well today, said Keys, who had predicted

on Saturday that playing on clay would be beneficial in her bid to defeat Wozniacki.

"I also felt I kept a lot of pressure on her, making a lot of returns and keeping rallies going and not going for things too early," said the world number 18, who won 76 percent of points on her first serve, and fired six aces. "More than anything I really trusted my game and went for my shots."

That was most evident late in the first set and the tiebreak.

The big-serving Keys trailed 5-6 in the opening set before forcing the tiebreak, which remained close until 4-3 when the fifth-seeded Wozniacki double faulted. Keys won the next point but twice had backhand errors to allow Wozniacki to pull within 6-5. A backhand down the line enabled Keys to finally claim the set. "I just knew the games I was losing in the first set I was just being too tentative and not really trusting my shot," said the 24-year-old American. "I knew

I had to go for it. I think that's how I have to play... 100 percent believing in my game." Keys broke Wozniacki in the sixth game of the second set to go up 4-2 and when she made it 5-2 that all but clinched the match.

"It's definitely been a really great week for me, especially after having some really tough losses the last couple of weeks," Keys said. "It definitely is a very good springboard for heading over to Europe."

Azarenka was grimacing and stretching after nearly every point and, after Muguruza broke for a 3-1 lead, the two-time Aus-

tralian Open champion decided to call it quits. The Belarusian had entered the final full of hope after surprising top seed Angel-

ique Kerber 6-4 4-6 6-1 in Saturday's semi-finals.

Azarenka had won her only previous meeting with Mugu-

ruza in the round of 16 at the Miami Open in April 2016, when she went on to win the title in her most recent final before Sunday.

RUGBY

French federation to pay Noves 1mn euros for wrongful dismissal

AFP
Toulouse, France

The French rugby federation was ordered by an industrial tribunal yesterday to pay 1.0 million euros in compensation to sacked national coach Guy Noves.

Noves, who had sought 2.9 million euros (\$3.7 million) in damages, became the first France coach ever to be sacked, in December 2017, after a meagre seven wins from 22 matches alongside 14 defeats and a humiliating home draw with 2019 World Cup hosts Japan.

Under Noves, France lost six consecutive games between June and November 2017, a string of results that federation chief Bernard Laporte deemed unacceptable.

Noves, who had been appointed by Laporte's predecessor Pierre Camou, was replaced by former Italy coach Jacques Brunel in time for the 2018 Six Nations.

The industrial tribunal in the southwestern city of Toulouse ruled yesterday that there had been an "abusive early termination of (Noves') employment contract with-

out serious misconduct". The tribunal added that it did not accept that there had been "moral harassment", but noted the harm done to Noves' reputation.

Noves, 65, was capped seven times by France as a winger and followed up a 12-year playing career with Toulouse by becoming assistant coach and then head coach of the Top 14 giants between 1993-2015.

Under Noves, Toulouse won four European Cups and nine domestic titles, a startling coaching record he was unable to mirror with France.

"It's been 15 months we've been working on this," said Noves. "We were hoping for this result and for the moment we're happy."

"When we turned to the industrial tribunal, it was to clean the honour of a person."

"I was accused of serious misconduct and the tribunal was very clear on that subject: there wasn't serious misconduct."

Despite a disappointing Six Nations campaign this season in which France lost three of their five matches, the federation has told Brunel he can remain in his role until the end of the World Cup.



THE MASTERS

Excitement builds for year's 1st major

'The buzz is unbelievable, it gets me excited for next week'



A general view of the leaderboard during a practice round prior to The Masters at Augusta National Golf Club.

AFP
Augusta, United States

Newcomers, past winners and a host of green jacket hopefuls made final preparations Sunday at Augusta National on the eve of official practice rounds for the 83rd Masters.

The year's first major championship begins Thursday at the famed course under the Georgia pines with Rory McIlroy making his 11th Augusta National start and fifth attempt to complete a Career Grand Slam by winning the Masters.

The 29-year-old Northern Ireland star, a four-time major champion, has finished between fourth and 10th in each of the past five years at the Masters, sharing fifth last year, and is a Las Vegas oddsmakers pick to win this time.

If he dons the green jacket next Sunday, McIlroy would become only the

sixth player to have won each of the major titles at least once in his career, joining legends Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Ben Hogan and Gene Sarazen.

"It would be a massive achievement. It would be huge," McIlroy said during his run-up to Augusta. "But I can't think about it that way."

Among those driving down Magnolia Lane to Augusta National's clubhouse early was 22-year-old Aaron Wise, a South African-born American who won last year's PGA Byron Nelson title to claim his first Masters berth.

"Right now I'm just soaking it all in," Wise said. "We can all remember the great moments and great shots just from having watched on TV."

Wise, whose family moved to the United States when he was three, was last year's US PGA Tour Rookie of the Year. He missed the cut in three prior major starts as he and 16 other newcomers pre-

pare for their Masters debuts.

"Coming to Augusta I feel good. I love the place," said two-time Masters champion Bubba Watson. "I'm thankful just to be here."

Watson was on hand for the start and finish of the Augusta National Women's Amateur on Saturday and was among presenters in Sunday's Drive, Chip and Putt Championship for youth.

"The buzz is unbelievable," said Australia's Adam Scott, the 2013 Masters champion. "It gets me excited for next week."

The biggest excitement is coming from defending champion Patrick Reed, who is now based out of the Champions Locker Room.

"This year, having all the extra activities, extra things going on, it's going to be a lot of fun," Reed said. "I honestly can't wait."

"To come back and experience what it's like to be on the first tee as defend-

ing champion is going to be an awesome experience. Just can't wait to cherish all the moments."

Anticipation is building outside the course as well.

Signs are already posted saying "Golf Tickets Needed" in hotels and on the sides of the road with people looking for a deal on one of the toughest tickets in sport.

Along Washington Road, the highway golfers take to reach Magnolia Lane, several restaurants have their party tents assembled and ready for the visitors from around the world to arrive.

The most exclusive meal of the week will be Tuesday's Champions Dinner, where Reed serves the menu he has dreamed about having since he was a teenager — ribeye steak, macaroni and cheese, creamed spinach and creamed corn.

"I'm definitely going to fatten everyone up," Reed said.

SPOTLIGHT

Korea's Ko claims ANA Inspiration title in style

AFP
Los Angeles

R eigning rookie of the year Ko Jin-young captured her first major championship on Sunday, holding off fellow South Korean Lee Mi-hyang to win the ANA Inspiration by three strokes.

The 23-year-old Ko finished in style by draining a long birdie putt on 18 for a two-under 70 final round in the first major of the season at the Mission Hills Country Club near Palm Springs, California.

"I won the tournament and that's a happy moment," Ko said. "I thank God, I thank my parents, I thank my grandparents. It is an honour for me to join so many great Korean players. I'm honoured to be here."

Ko, who is in her second year, finished with a 10-under 278 total for her fourth LPGA title. She also won the Hope Founder's Cup last month.

Ko celebrated her win by taking the traditional dip with her caddie Dave Brooker in Poppie's Pond — the water hazard located off the right and back of the green on 18.

Lee finished alone in second after shooting a two-under 70 while American Lexi Thompson was third with a brilliant final round of 67 to reach a six-under 282 total.

Kim In-kyung and Carlota Ciganda, of Spain, tied for fourth

at five under, five strokes back of Ko. Ko started the round with a one shot lead. She played steady golf on the front nine with two birdies but saw her lead slip to just one stroke over Lee when she made bogey on the 15th hole. She landed her approach in the bunker and then two-putted on the green. It was her second bogey in three holes.

But Ko got one back by sinking a superb putt for a birdie on the par-four 16th. She parred 17 then iced the win with an emphatic 20 foot birdie putt on 18.

Not only is she the fifth South Korean to win here, Ko is the 15th in history to win a major. The only country that has more major wins is the United States.

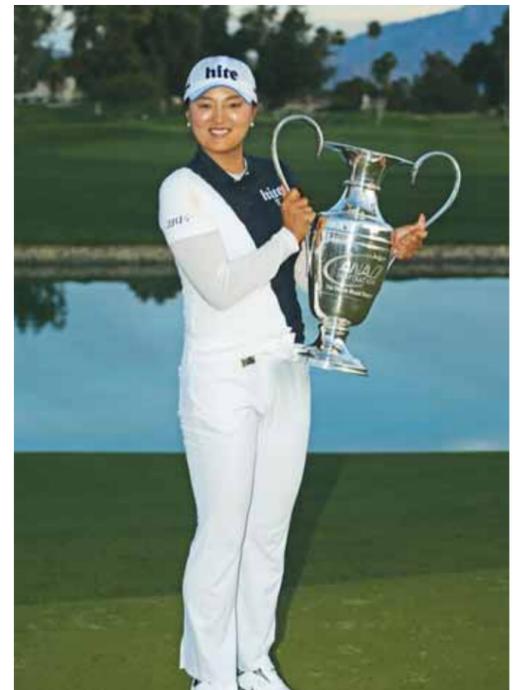
"I can't believe it," said Ko. "I was nervous on all my shots."

Thompson also made a run at Ko but her seven-stroke deficit was too much to make up.

"It feels amazing," Thompson said. "I birdied the first hole and actually hit a ball out of bounds on number three but still managed to make bogey. My caddie helped out tremendously."

In addition to the professionals, five amateur players competed in the event continuing a longstanding tradition of exemptions for top women amateurs.

Patty Tavatanakit, who is ranked third in the world, finished as the top amateur in the field after closing with a four under 68 a tie for 26th with nine others — including fellow Thai Pornanong Phatlum.



Ko Jin-young of South Korea poses with the Dinah Shore Trophy after winning the ANA Inspiration on the Dinah Shore course at Mission Hills Country Club in Rancho Mirage, California.

BOTTOMLINE

Connors headed to Augusta after winning Texas Open

Reuters
San Antonio

Canadian Corey Connors clinched an astonishing two-shot victory over American Charley Hoffman at the Texas Open on Sunday to punch the final ticket to the Masters.

Connors, ranked 196th in the world, compiled a crazy, roller-coaster six-under-par 66 that included 10 birdies in the final round at TPC San Antonio.

He followed four early birdies with four consecutive bogeys on the front nine before storming home with six birdies and three pars to claim his first PGA Tour title.

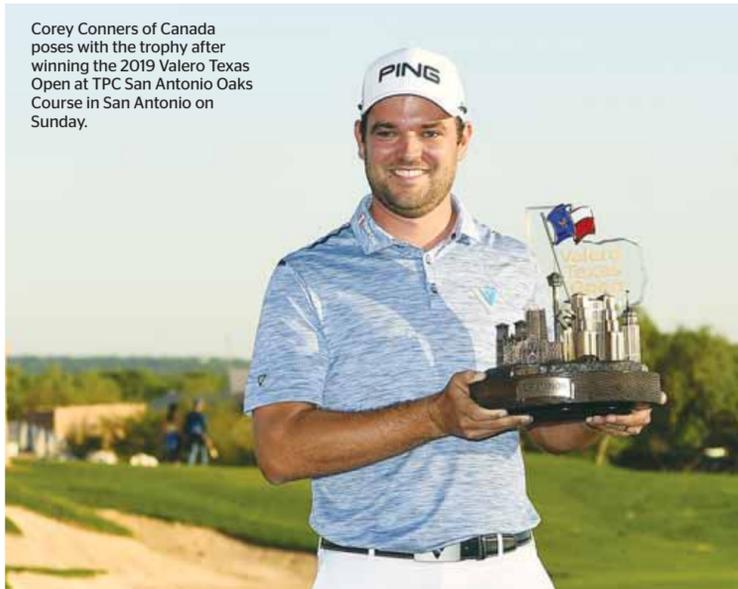
"It just doesn't seem real," Connors told reporters after finishing at 20-under 268 to secure his second shot at the Masters after playing as an amateur in 2015.

Hoffman birdied the par-five 18th to shoot 67 and claim second place, a shot ahead of fellow American Ryan Moore (64).

South Korean overnight leader Kim Si-woo (72) faded to equal fourth with American Brian Stuard (66) on 15-under.

"I've been close a few times and feel like I've learned a lot in those situations and that really

Corey Connors of Canada poses with the trophy after winning the 2019 Valero Texas Open at TPC San Antonio Oaks Course in San Antonio on Sunday.



helped today," said Connors, the 15th Canadian to win on Tour.

"I couldn't be more excited to get over the edge. There's so many perks that come with it."

The 27-year-old from Ontario was so low on the pecking order

that he was not even exempt into the Texas Open.

Instead, he had to run the gauntlet of a Monday qualifier, among 73 players competing for four spots.

Six players ended up in a play-

off for the final berth, and Connors was the man to emerge triumphant and he went on to become the first Monday qualifier to win since 2010.

Connors started the final round a shot behind Kim, but

powered to a four-shot lead after just five holes as the birdies flowed.

But what the golfing gods give, they also take away, and the Canadian lost those four strokes as quickly as he had gained them as Hoffman took the lead with a birdie at the ninth.

"Got off to a great start, birdied number five and walked to sixth tee thinking, 'wow, this is really awesome' and then reeled off four bogeys," Connors said.

"I didn't get too down on myself. I knew I was playing really well. It was nice to have a little break between nine and 10 and give myself a bit of a pep talk."

Although Hoffman did not drop a shot on the back nine and picked up three more birdies, it that was not enough to stop a rampant Connors, whose putter was running hotter than a Texas summer as wife Mallory watched on nervously from the gallery.

Connors came to the last with a three-shot lead and held his nerve to book the final seat on the Sunday night charter flight to Augusta, where the first major championship of the year will tee off on Thursday.

"The last few holes are a bit of a blur," he said.

"Big change of plans. It was just going to be an off week but it's not now."

FOCUS

Women and kids take over Augusta National

Reuters
Augusta

A day after Augusta National crowned a first women's champion it was Kid's Day at the home of the Masters on Sunday, one of world's most exclusive clubs taking on an amusement park vibe.

Once the private sanctuary for some of world's richest and most powerful men, Augusta National shed some of its stodgy old boy image during a 24-hour goodwill blitz.

First the club hosted the final round of the inaugural Augusta National Women's Amateur championship on Saturday and then on Sunday it was invaded by 80 boys and girls between the ages of seven and 15 for the Drive, Chip and Putt National Championship.

The images of women competing at a club where just seven years ago they had been denied membership and the sight of smiling kids cavorting and playing for trophies on the 18th green

stand in stark contrast to Augusta National's darker days when neither seemed particularly welcome.

Founded by Bobby Jones and Clifford Roberts and opened for play in January 1933, Augusta National for decades was unmoved by outside forces and events.

But it seems even at Augusta National things are a changing. With Masters week set to kick off on Monday, there were few signs, aside from the presence of a few former champions in green jackets, that the year's first major was about to be contested as kids competed while others tumbled and cartwheeled down the fairway.

The rules that will be strictly enforced next week — when no running will be allowed on the manicured landscape — were relaxed as youngsters playfully scurried around, with security personnel turning a blind eye.

"Everything seems to have evolved around here — in a good way," Canadian Mike Weir, who will be making his 20th Masters start this year and won the Green Jacket in 2003, told Reuters.

23RD ASIAN ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

Bragging rights on the line at Asian athletics meet

China hope to reclaim the top spot that India won in the last edition; hosts Qatar aim to move up the pecking order

QNA
Doha

Several world and Asian champions will go head-to-head in Doha in two weeks' time to compete for top honours in Asian athletics when Khalifa International Stadium hosts the 23rd Asian Athletics Championships from April 21-24.

Nearly 700 elite Asian athletes from 44 nations will be competing for 186 medals in 21 events each for men and women, besides a mixed relay event that will make its debut in the showpiece.

As the competition brings together the usual Asian powerhouses in athletics, China is set to go all the way in attempts to maintain its continental dominance and reclaim the top position that India won in the previous edition.

China's ranks at the 23rd Asian Athletics Championships boast female shot-putter Gong Lijiao, a 2017 World Championships gold medalist and two-time Olympic medalist, and Li Ling, Asian Games champion in 2014 and 2018 in pole vault.

Lu Huihui, a two-time world medalist in javelin throw; Chen Yang, Asian Games title holder in discus throw; and Wang Chunyu, the Asian Games reigning champion in 800 metres, will all feature at Khalifa International Stadium.

Our athletes are ready to make the country proud. We prepared well for this competition and we realise how great an opportunity it is to build on our success at the Asian Games and brace ourselves for the World Championships in September

— Dr Thani al-Kuwari,
Qatar Athletics Federation
President

On the men's side, China's team includes the likes of Xie Wenjun, Asian Games champion in 2014 and 2018 in 100m hurdles, who will be looking to maintain his continental dominance.

China's path to the top place will not be easy though as the team are likely to face strong competition from other elite athletes taking part in the event.



Syrian high-jumper Majd Eddin Ghazal, who celebrates his 32nd birthday on the opening day of the competition, is a 2017 World Championships London bronze medalist.



India's Hima Das will try to build on her performance from the 2018 Asian Games where she won a gold medal in the 4x400m event. The promising sprinter is also the reigning world U20 champion in 400m.



Chinese shot-putter Gong Lijiao is a 2017 World Championships gold medalist and two-time Olympic medalist.

Hosts Qatar will be aiming to finish as high as possible in the competition's medal table, and they have the personnel to back that bid up.

Qatar's two-time Olympic medalist Mutaz Barshim will lead a line-up of 29 athletes representing the home nation in the Asian showpiece.

The 27-year-old high jumper, who holds the Asian

record and the third-best jump of all time at 2.43m, is fit again after suffering an injury last year.

Team Qatar for the 23rd Asian Athletics Championships will also include 400m sprinter Abdalrahman Samba and hammer-thrower Ashraf El Seify, who all won gold medals at the 2018 Asian Games.

The team also boast promising female sprinter Mariam Farid and hammer-thrower Rania al-Naji who will attempt to make their mark on the continental stage.

"Our athletes are ready to make the country proud. We prepared well for this competition and we realise how great an opportunity

it is to build on our success at the Asian Games and brace ourselves for the World Championships in September," said Qatar Athletics

Federation president Dr Thani Abdulrahman al-Kuwari.

Meanwhile, last edition's winners India will be another team to watch thanks to the pool of talent they have, which was able to finally dethrone China who had won a record 17 consecutive editions since 1983.

India's 19-year-old sensation Hima Das will try to build on her performance from the 2018 Asian Games where she won a gold medal in the 4x400m event. The promising

sprinter is also the reigning world U20 champion in 400m.

Mohamed Anas Yahya is another Indian athlete with potential to reach the podium. The sprinter, who specialises in 400m, claimed three silver medals in last year's Asian Games in the individual 400m, men's 4x400m and the mixed 4x400.

"Asian Athletics Championships Doha 2019 is a very important competition for our athletes as it will serve as a build-up not just for the World Championships 2019 but also provide a good competition to our athletes who are preparing for qualification for Tokyo 2020 Olympics. We are expecting a similar show from our athletes as was in 2017 where India topped the overall medals tally with a total of 29 medals. This time too we are expecting to win between 25 to 30 medals," said Athletics Federation of India President Adil J. Sumariwalla.

With a huge Indian expat community based in Doha, the Indian team will be counting on their compatriots to gain a home advantage in bid to retain their title.

"We expect Indians staying in Qatar to turn up in big numbers to support Indian athletes. Fans turned out in large numbers in the last edition of the competition in Bhubaneswar, India, and it really pumped up our Athletes to give their best.

"Our message to Indian expats in Qatar is: We need you; we want you to fill up the stadium and we wish to see Indian tri-colour flying high every-

where. Please come and watch athletics and support your team," Sumariwalla added.

Among the top athletes featuring in the competition as well is Syria's Majd Eddin Ghazal. The high jumper, who celebrates his 32nd birthday on the opening day of the competition, is a bronze medalist in World Championships London 2017 and Asian Athletics Championships Bhubaneswar 2017.

Asian Athletics Championships is a very important competition for our athletes as it will serve as a build-up not just for the World Championships 2019 but also provide a good competition to our athletes who are preparing for qualification for Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

— Adile J. Sumariwalla,
Athletics Federation of India
President

Hossein Keyhani is another athlete who will be looking to build on his recent successes. The Iranian runner secured gold medal in the 3000m steeplechase event at the Asian Games 2018, which he followed on from winning the same race in the Asian Indoor Championships. Asian Athletics Championships is an official test event for the IAAF World Championships Doha 2019, which will be held from September 28 to October 6. It will be held in the Middle East for the first time.



Hosts Qatar will be represented by 29 athletes including star high-jumper Mutaz Barshim (left) and 400m hurdler Abdalrahman Samba (right).

SPOTLIGHT

Jordan opens Aspire embassies futsal with win

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Aspire Embassies Futsal Tournament kicked off with eight thrilling matches last Thursday and Saturday. The tournament, which concludes on April 27, features 16 teams from foreign embassies in Qatar and is organised in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA).

The Jordanian Embassy team made a perfect start to the tournament with a comprehensive 8-0 victory over the Indian Embassy in the opening match of group A. The same group saw a team representing the Embassy of Mali defeat a team representing Syrian embassy 5-2.

In Group B, a team from the Embassy of South Africa secured a 8-2 victory over a team from the Iraqi Embassy, while Bosnia lost to Eritrea 7-1.

In Saturday's matches, the Spanish Embassy team defeated a team from the Japanese Embassy (9-0); a team from the Embassy of Oman lost to a team representing the Embassy of Azerbaijan (15-0); Portugal beat Djibouti (4-2); and the MoFA for the State of Qatar defeated France (6-2).

After the victory by the Jordanian team during the opening



Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs beat the French embassy team.

match, the Second Secretary of the Embassy of Jordan, Fadel al-Moqbel said, "The Aspire Embassies Futsal tournament demonstrates the productive co-operation between the embassies in Doha and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The involvement of the Jordanian Embassy during this tournament reflects our keenness to make a positive social and cultural contribution as well as engage in athletic and

sporting activities. This tournament provides us with an opportunity to contribute to the diplomatic community in Qatar."

He added: "We are proud of all that Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) has achieved. The organisation's progress is characterised by careful planning and a firm commitment to cater to the interests of the community. The recent success at AFC Asian Cup 2019 demonstrates

the effectiveness of Aspire's approach. The Jordanian Embassy and all that work here are active partners in contributing to the broader growth, development and progress that the State of Qatar is making. And we're committed to being active and engaged members of the broader community."

Representing the protocol department at the MoFA, Mosaed Eid Abdullah Salem al-Mohannadi, said, "This is an excellent initiative developed by AZF as well as its partners and sponsors. Organising this event and bringing together so many embassies is a huge achievement. We're delighted to take part yet again, now for the third year. We look forward to taking part in future editions."

He added: "This is a great opportunity for all of us to get out of the office and enjoy the informal atmosphere of friendly competitions between embassies and diplomatic missions operating in the country. We thank all the officials at Aspire Zone who worked so effectively together to facilitate everything that is needed to make the event a success."

The tournament, which is sponsored by Vodafone Qatar, was developed on the back of the mini Aspire Ramadan Festival edition in 2015. It presents an excellent opportunity for diplomats and representatives of the country's embassies to interact with one another in an entirely different setting other than the office, and to make the most of a lively and competitive sporting atmosphere.

The next matches are on April 11 and April 13, and the action will begin at 4pm. The members of the public are open to attend matches and cheer for their team.

Amir Cup Shooting and Archery Championship



First-placed Ahmad al-Shammari (rear centre), second-placed Ali al-Hassan Morsheid (rear left) and third-placed Rashid al-Marri (rear right) celebrate on the podium for 25m Standard Pistol at the Amir Cup Shooting and Archery Championship at the Losail Shooting Ranges yesterday.