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CRICKET | Page 4

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GULF TIMES

SPORT



TENNIS

**'It's good to be back:'
Serena eases to win
in Rome return**

Page 7

FOOTBALL

Xavi in spotlight in Amir Cup final at Al Wakrah Stadium

'We are looking forward to sampling the incredible atmosphere during the final'



Al Sadd captain Xavi will be playing his last domestic match when he takes the field against Al Duhail in the Amir Cup final on Thursday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar is now just days away from another momentous milestone on the road to 2022, as the finishing touches are being made to open Al Wakrah Stadium for the 2019 Amir Cup final on Thursday.

The stadium – the second FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 venue to be opened – is the first arena to be completed from scratch, and will host the final between Al Sadd and Al Duhail.

Qatar Football Association (QFA) and the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC), the organisation responsible for delivering the infrastructure required for Qatar 2022, jointly announced that the 40,000-capacity venue would host the final during a press conference at Al Bidda Tower in April.

Following Al Sadd's 2-0 semi-final victory against Al Rayyan, and his recent announcement that the 2018-19 season will be his last domestic match as a player, the match also takes on added significance as it will be the final time legendary midfielder and SC Ambassador Xavi Hernández takes to the field.

There will be pre-match activities at 10:00pm to enhance the fan experience, before the game kicks off at 10:30pm. The match will be attended by His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

Commenting on the upcoming final, Khalid Mubarak al-Kuwari, the QFA's Director of Marketing & Communications, said: "We are honoured and excited that the final is nearly upon us."

"We congratulate Al Sadd and Al Duhail



Khalid Mubarak al-Kuwari, the QFA's Director of Marketing & Communications (R) speaks to the media yesterday as Khalid al-Naama, senior media relations manager SC (C) and Major Abdulla al-Ghanim, spokesperson of security committee, look on.

for qualifying for the final after a hard-fought competition. It will be an honour to watch two great teams go head-to-head in a stadium which will be the focus of the world's attention in 2022.

"We are looking forward to sampling the incredible atmosphere during the final. This is a match – and occasion – not to miss."

Jassim al-Jassim, the SC's Head of Venues Operations, added: "I would like to thank the thousands of people and numer-

ous stakeholders that have worked tirelessly to prepare Al Wakrah Stadium for this match. It has been a feat of collaboration, organisation and determination to get this magnificent stadium ready for inauguration."

He continued: "I am certain that in 2022 Al Wakrah Stadium will be one of the most iconic venues at the World Cup, and it gives us all a sense of great pride to be opening the second Qatar 2022 stadium with three-

and-a-half years to go. I look forward to working together with all our stakeholders, friends and colleagues over the coming years to enjoy many more momentous occasions."

Tickets for this year's final are still available to buy, either online at tickets.qfa.qa or from a host of outlets across the country, including Villaggio Mall, Mall of Qatar, Doha Festival City, City Center, Souq Waqif and Ezdan Mall, Al Wakrah.

FOCUS

Boy with cancer inspires Hamilton to victory

AFP
Barcelona

Lewis Hamilton said he was inspired to victory in Sunday's Spanish Grand Prix by receiving a humbling message from a five-year-old boy who is fighting cancer.

The defending five-time world champion said the message from Harry Shaw, who is battling Ewing's Sarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer, helped him defeat Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas who beat him to pole in a "nightmare" qualifying session on Saturday.

Hamilton said that, after being outpaced by Bottas, the message was a welcome boost to his spirits.

"Yesterday was a difficult day, but I arrived today and I got this great message from this young kid called Harry and he just became my spirit and that was my inspiration," Hamilton told Sky Sports after winning ahead of Bottas to return to the top of the world championship.

"When I woke up, I was a bit lost and kind of 'how's today going to go?' and then I saw that message and I was like 'I see you Harry – I've got you!'"

"So I want to dedicate this one to Harry, if you are watching, and sending you the love."

Hamilton told reporters that after being outpaced to pole by Bottas at three consecutive events, he intended to analyse his one-lap performances.

"Yesterday, it was a bit of a nightmare," he said. "But luckily race pace has generally been quite good for me. I've been really happy and comfortable generally in the races."

After a fifth successive Mercedes one-two, Hamilton said he hoped that Ferrari would recover their form and mount a serious challenge to Mercedes.

Hamilton was linked with a future move to Ferrari on Sunday when Mercedes team chief

Toto Wolff said that scenario had been discussed during contract talks last year.

"I prefer it when they are in the mix with us," he said. "I prefer the races where, for example Bahrain, they're on the front row. I love that. Especially when we're kind of intertwined."

"The last couple of years that's what we've had and from a driver's point of view and a team's point of view it's much better."

Earlier Sunday, Wolff told reporters that he and Hamilton had discussed a future switch from Mercedes to Ferrari during contract talks and he stressed that it was important and "no drama" to be respectful and open-minded on the subject.

"We had the discussion when we negotiated the last contract and I think that you just have to be open-minded and understand that drivers will explore opportunities that exist and benchmark themselves," said Wolff.

"You have simply to acknowledge that probably it's in every driver's head to drive one day at Ferrari. It's the most iconic, historic brand out there and I respect a driver if he has the desire to drive at Ferrari."

"We have discussed it within the team and with Lewis and we have agreed on the topic."

Hamilton, 34, is under contract with Mercedes until the end of next year.

By then, he may have equalled Michael Schumacher's record of seven drivers' titles and be ready to retire to pursue his interests in fashion and music – or focus on one last big challenge on the track.

However, Wolff made clear that Hamilton has not expressed any desire to leave Mercedes.

"We are providing him with a car that is capable of achieving his objectives. I think if we continue to have a car that is on that level, there is no reason to go – and we would love him to stay."



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton celebrates after winning the Spanish Formula One Grand Prix at the Circuit de Catalunya in Montmeló in the outskirts of Barcelona on Sunday

SPOTLIGHT

Reds boss Klopp turns attention to Champions League

'We have qualified for the Champions League final. That is special. This team is one of the best that ever played for Liverpool, 100%'



A view of the Wanda Metropolitan stadium in Madrid where the UEFA Champions League final will be played on June 1 between Tottenham Hotspur FC and Liverpool FC. At bottom, Jurgen Klopp.

AFP
Liverpool

Jurgen Klopp has challenged Liverpool to use the pain of their failed Premier League title bid as fuel to finish a remarkable season with Champions League glory.

Liverpool fell one point short of winning their first league title since 1990 as Manchester City pipped Klopp's side on the final day of the season.

Liverpool's 2-0 win over Wolves was rendered irrelevant by City's 4-1 victory at Brighton, leaving the Anfield faithful frustrated after it briefly appeared they might witness two football miracles in the space of a week.

Last Tuesday's astonishing 4-0 win against Barcelona, which overturned a 3-0 first-leg deficit and sent Liverpool to their second successive Champions League final, was one of the greatest nights in the club's history.

And when Sadio Mane put Liverpool ahead early on against Wolves and City fell behind to Glenn Murray's goal, another unthinkable dream was about to become reality.

That tantalising moment lasted only a matter of seconds, however, as Sergio Aguerro equalised for City, who went on to shatter Liverpool's hopes with a ruthless goal-spree. It was cruel on Liverpool, who secured 30 wins and 97 points, set-



ting a standard that would have secured the title in any year but the last two, with Pep Guardiola's sensational City amassing 100 points 12 months ago and 98 this term.

Yet Klopp insists his players won't dwell on their agonising near-miss for long because they have a chance for redemption in the Champions League final against Tottenham in Madrid on June 1.

"We have qualified for the Champions League final. That is special. This team is one of the best that ever played for Liverpool, 100%," Klopp said.

"If I would start telling you all the positive things about this team we would be

here until an hour before the Champions League final.

"This club is in the best moment for a long time and it will not end because another team has one more point.

"If we are ready to make the next step, we will. That is the plan from tomorrow."

While Klopp is confident Liverpool can bring home the club's sixth European Cup and first since 2005, even if they do triumph in Madrid the German doesn't believe his team are at the peak of their powers yet. "I am not worried that this is as good as it can be. This team is not the finished article," he said.

"We had an unbelievable season. I can

read all the numbers. It would be nice to get an award for the biggest development I can remember.

"We made a big step. But really think there is more to come. We will go again."

Reeling in City won't be a piece of cake for Klopp and the 51-year-old conceded Guardiola's group present a unique challenge.

"As long as Manchester City are around with their financial power, no team will pass them easily," Klopp said.

"We need to be very close to perfection to win the Premier League as long as this is the case."

As the sun-soaked Liverpool fans retreated to the pubs around the city, the mood remained upbeat.

Rather than drowning their sorrows, all the talk was of Madrid and the chance for another magical day in a season that featured so many highs.

"I never expected it to happen today. Realistically City had it in their hands. We've got a great opportunity to win number six in Madrid, that's all we care about now," Reds fan Stephen Mulgrew told AFP.

Dom Tyler, another diehard supporter, said he had started the day optimistic, but his focus was also on the Champions League.

"When Brighton scored I thought I was going to cry. I really thought we could do it. It didn't happen but there's nothing to be ashamed of. We've got a hell of a team and there's still everything to play for," he said.

FOCUS

Hazard says Blues know about his future

AFP
London

Eden Hazard has told Chelsea he has made his mind up over his future but has yet to publicly announce if he will stay at Stamford Bridge after persistent speculation linking him with a move to Real Madrid.

The Belgium forward has just a year left on his contract after joining the Premier League club from Lille for £32m (\$42m) in 2012.

And after a substitute outing in Sunday's 0-0 draw at Leicester the Belgium international revealed he had made the club aware of his decision.

"Yes. A couple of weeks ago. Yes I have made my decision but it is not just about me," said Hazard, who blew kisses to the travelling fans, who called for him to stay.

"I have made my decision, that's it."

When asked if his future will become clear after the Europa League final against Arsenal on May 29 he added: "I think so. We have a final to play and then I will see."

The Blues are understood to be holding out for £100m.

The 28-year-old also admitted he had wanted his future resolved earlier to avoid it being the season-long saga it has become.

"Yes, I wanted that but that's not happened. I'm still waiting like you are waiting and like the fans are waiting," he said.

"When you are on the pitch, you try to be focused on the pitch with the ball. That's it. When I am on the pitch I

just try to do the best.

"I am not thinking about this and this, my situation or the club's situation. I just try to win games."

Hazard played the final 21 minutes at the King Power Stadium as Chelsea finished third in the Premier League, 26 points behind champions Manchester City.

Chelsea manager Maurizio Sarri said earlier he was still in the dark over Hazard's future.

Hazard has talked about it being "a dream" to one day play for Real Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane but Sarri said he did not know if the playmaker was set to leave swap London for Madrid.

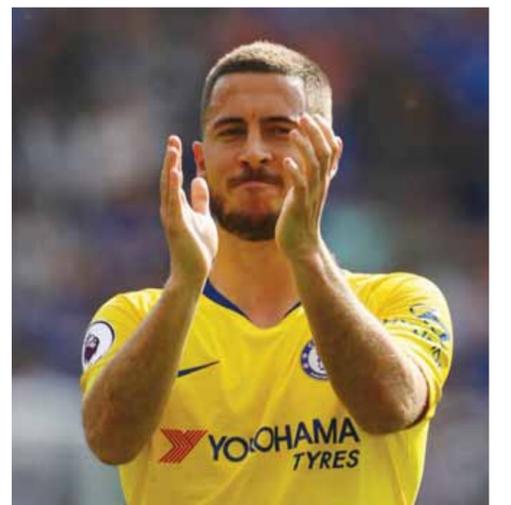
"I hope of course, like every fan of Chelsea, that he will remain with us," he said. "But at the moment I don't know."

"I know very well that Eden tried to do his best for seven seasons at Chelsea," the Blues boss added. "He did very well, he has become one of the best two or three players in the world, but I think also that we have to respect him and his decision."

Sarri also cast doubt over his own position and could not say for sure if he will be at Stamford Bridge for a second season. "I think but I am not sure. I don't know. I can say only the club asked me to get into the Champions League and we reached the target — the Champions League."

"As you know very well, I love English football."

"I love the Premier League, the level is really the best in the world I think, the atmosphere in the stadiums is wonderful. I like very much to stay here."



Chelsea's Eden Hazard applauds fans after the match against Leicester City on Monday.

BOTTOMLINE

City, Liverpool set new mark with 'fusion football'

Reuters
Liverpool

Manchester City retained their Premier League crown on Sunday, pipping Liverpool to the title by a single point, but while the remarkable numbers of this campaign tell their own story this season was about much more than just consistent point accumulation.

Pep Guardiola's City and Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool achieved their results playing brands of entertaining, attacking and positive football that have set a new standard in the English — and indeed European — game.

Manchester City's 98 points and Liverpool's 97, with third-placed Chelsea a further 25 points adrift, certainly illustrate just how relentlessly successful the top two were.

Their combined 195 points were a top-flight record for the champions and runners-up; indeed, they broke the old mark with two games to spare. The 62 wins they amassed together was also a record for a top two.

And not even the intense pressure and nerves of a neck-and-neck title race could push them towards error.

City won their last 14 matches, a streak stretching back to January, while Liverpool ended with nine straight wins — with their solitary defeat of the season coming at City over four months ago.

But while there were some key wins, in the closing stages particularly, won by narrow margins, the pair combined for 184 goals, an average of 2.4 goals per game. Klopp and Guardiola have avoided barbs or mind-games throughout the season and have barely needed prompting to praise each other's teams.

The sense that both teams deserve huge plaudits for their football this season has also been clear from the views of expert observers, such as former Liverpool midfielder Graeme Souness.

"City are a fantastic team. They play the game the right way, with strength and depth in their squad. Special teams retain the title," said the Scot, now an analyst with Sky Sports.

"This is a fabulous Liverpool team, and I can't tell you in my lifetime where you have such an outstanding runner-up. I liken it to the World Cup in 1982, and Brazil. They were the best team never to win the World Cup. This Liverpool team is the best team not to win the Premier League."

What is fascinating is that those year-long debates over numerical formations — whether it be 4-4-2, five at the back, diamonds, Christmas trees and 'false nines' — have been notice-

ably absent this season.

The reason for that is that neither City nor Liverpool play with strictly formatted systems.

Liverpool nominally play four at the back but their full-backs Trent Alexander-Arnold and Andy Robertson are essential parts of their attacking threat. The 20-year-old Alexander-Arnold's 12th and 13th assists of the season on Sunday gave him a new record for a defender in the Premier League era. Robertson wasn't far behind, having created 11 goals this season.

City's frontline could be described as a trio — with Sergio Aguerro flanked by two wingers, usually Raheem Sterling with one of Leroy Sane, Bernardo Silva or Riyad Mahrez on the opposite flank. But Bernardo Silva at times also played as a midfield general, alongside or instead of David Silva, and at full-strength City's midfield is very much part of their attack, with only Brazilian

Fernandinho having a clear defensive role. Likewise, Liverpool's Brazilian midfielder Fabinho has also been crucial in that anchor, or holding, midfield role, sweeping up trouble in front of the defence and providing a base which gives freedom to the more attacking midfielders. The evolving tactics of Klopp and Guardiola have other similarities, especially the crucial ability of their attacking players to swiftly seek to recover the ball after losing possession.

There are, though, significantly different elements to the two ways of playing. City rely on lengthy spells of possession to stretch opponents and open up gaps in their defence, whereas Liverpool's high-intensity attacks can simply sweep opponents away in powerful, forward waves.

But both approaches are hugely entertaining to watch and allow the technical quality of their players to shine

— they are above all two teams who enforce their will on their opponents, with styles which depend on self-knowledge and a confidence in their own superiority.

Foreign coaches are nothing new in English football but the Spaniard and the German have done much more than prove they can deal with the challenges of the Premier League — they have transformed the style of football English fans now expect.

The combination of tactical approaches they have established in La Liga, the Bundesliga and the Champions League have been allied with the high-tempo, intensity for which the English game has long been known.

The result is a fusion of football styles which draws on a plurality of European traditions, approaches and tactics but which appeals to the English supporter — and which, above all, delivers results.

SPECIAL FEATURE

How Manchester City tweaked their tactics to counter Liverpool threat

Pep Guardiola adopted a more pragmatic approach in some games, including at Anfield, and while their football was maybe less exciting, their season was hugely impressive

By Jonathan Wilson
The Guardian

Football changed in 2008: Pep Guardiola became the manager of Barcelona. Football had been evolving anyway. There had been amendments to the laws to encourage more technical, attacking football (the backpass law, the liberalisation of offside, the crackdown on intimidatory tackling). There had been changes to the economics such that the gulf between rich and poor had grown.

But what Guardiola achieved at Barcelona with a supreme generation of players shifted the parameters of what was believed to be possible. It is that philosophy that continues to guide him and has underlain Manchester City's success over the past two seasons.

On the very odd occasions when things go against his side, Guardiola can be prickly about that. "I won 21 titles in seven years: three titles per year playing in this way," he said in his trophyless first season in England. "I'm sorry, guys. I'm not going to change." It is true in the broadest sense but manifestly false on a more macro level. Guardiola is renowned for the research he does into opponents: he is forever striding through Marti Perarnau's books, clutching portfolios of information about his opponents – what would be the point of that if he didn't act upon it?

There was evidence of that even against Brighton on Sunday. Chris Hughton's side had won only two of

their previous 17 games. City had already beaten them twice this season. Yet Guardiola did not just opt for the same again but instead set up in a strange 4-4-1-1 with Raheem Sterling operating as a second striker and Bernardo Silva and Riyad Mahrez as wide midfielders.

Perhaps that was a response to the FA Cup semi-final, when Brighton had managed largely to hold City at arm's length (although only after going 1-0 down), perhaps it was in expectation of Brighton, who had let in only three goals in their previous four games, putting up the shutters and hoping to see out the storm, and Guardiola wanted to disrupt their marking structures.

As it was, Brighton played with the freedom of the reprieved and City, having made few inroads, with Sterling in particular seeming ineffective in his central role, ended up switching back soon enough to a more familiar 4-3-3.

That has been the base, as it always has been for Guardiola, as it usually has been for teams who follow the total football template. The width offered by the two wingers is essential in spreading the play. In that regard, this season was more of the same. There was more Bernardo Silva and less Kevin De Bruyne (largely because of injury), Sterling was even more potent attacking from the flank, and John Stones yielded to Aymeric Laporte but fundamentally this was City in the same old routine.

Pass completion rate was 89.0%, the same as last season. Possession fell slightly, from 66.4% to 64.0%, but shots per game against shots conceded

per game improved from 17.5-6.2 to 18-6.3. There were two fewer points and 11 fewer goals scored but there were also two fewer goals conceded.

There was also a sense this season of City regularly playing within themselves. Their games, certainly in the second half of the season when they dropped only three points, tended to follow a pattern: they would take the lead and then, rather than chasing big scores, revelling in their virtuosity, they preferred control.

In 16 games this season, City went ahead within the first 15 minutes; only one of those – the away defeat at Newcastle – did they not win. After that Newcastle game, City kept 10 clean sheets in 14 games. Control became their defining quality.

Guardiola may have changed in other ways but he still does not coach the tackles: again, City lie bottom of the tackles per game table this season. That, as much as a sense of familiarity, perhaps explains why City's football seems to have left some observers cold this season: certainly it is not as obviously exciting as the turbulence of so many of Liverpool's games.

But that is not Guardiola's concern: his job is to win, and he kept on doing that. The irony is that strike and control was Liverpool's method through the glory days of Bill Shankly and Bob Paisley. City, aided by the financial structures of the modern game have taken that to new extremes: their run of 14 straight victories to claim the title on the final day is the second-longest winning streak in Premier League his-



Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola is thrown into the air by his players as they celebrate after their 4-1 victory over Brighton and Hove Albion at the American Express Community Stadium in Brighton on Sunday.

tory – behind only City's own run of 18 last season. But perhaps the most telling moment of the season came last October when City went to Anfield where they had lost 4-3 and 3-0 the previous season in the league and Champions League respectively. The 4-3-3 was gone, at least without the

ball, and in its place came a 4-4-1-1 with Sterling and Mahrez tucking in and David Silva operating as a second striker and Kyle Walker often functioning as a de facto third central defender. Guys, I'm not going to change? Well, perhaps just this once, against his closest rivals.

The expected thrill-a-minute ding-dong failed to materialise but City successfully thwarted Liverpool and would have won had Mahrez not missed a late penalty. As it was, the draw could be seen as the result that won the title. More of the same, but with a dose of added pragmatism.

SERIE A

Juventus lose stripes and match as Roma keep CL hopes alive

AFP
Milan

Alessandro Florenzi and Edin Dzeko scored late as Roma beat Juventus 2-0 to keep their hopes of Champions League football next season alive on Sunday.

Dzeko set up Florenzi for the first after 79 minutes in the Stadio Olimpico with the Bosnian then slotting in the second two minutes into injury time as Juventus fell to just their third defeat this season.

The defeat came on the day that Juventus displayed their new strip which no longer features the club's iconic black and white stripes in a breakaway from over a century of tradition.

Massimiliano Allegri's side have not won a match since sealing an eighth consecutive Scudetto, being held to 1-1 draws in their last two games against Inter Milan and Torino. Roma needed a win after their Champions League rivals Atalanta, AC Milan, Torino and Lazio all won their games this weekend.

Juventus and Napoli have already booked their berths in next season's elite European berths with two places remaining.

Atalanta beat Genoa 2-1 on Saturday to move third two points ahead of Inter Milan, who play bottom club Chievo on Monday.

AC Milan also won 1-0 against Fiorentina, and are one point behind Inter in fifth, with Roma equal on points with Milan, with two games left to play.

"A great (goalkeeper Antonio) Mirante kept us up in the first half but I am satisfied with the game," said Roma coach Claudio Ranieri.

"We must continue to believe in it. Even if not everything depends on us, we must reach the end with a clear conscience."

Playing in their new jerseys, Juventus with nothing left to play for, and with growing speculation over Allegri's future, failed to take advantage of their first half domination.

Mirante pulled off towering saves, denying Juan Cuadrado and Paulo Dybala.

After the break Cristiano Ronaldo had the ball in the back of the net after 64 minutes



AS Roma players celebrate after scoring a goal against Juventus at the Olympic stadium in Rome on Sunday.

but was ruled offside.

But Roma captain Florenzi, perhaps annoyed by Ronaldo who had just made fun of his size, turned things around when he picked up a Dzeko cross to break the deadlock.

Dzeko added the second in injury time as Roma join AC Milan on 62 points, with Torino, now two points behind, dropping out of the European places into seventh.

Torino captain Andrea Belotti scored a brace including the winner with a spectacular overhead kick in a come from behind 3-2 win over ten-man Sassuolo.

Belotti missed a penalty after 17 minutes in Turin but made up with two second-half goals.

"We knew very well how important it was to win today," said Belotti. "We have to fly low, there are still two games left and we have to win them."

Mehdi Bourabia put Sassuolo ahead after 27 minutes, but the visitors played a man down for most of the game as the Moroccan midfielder was sent off for a second yellow card after celebrating by pulling his jersey over his head.

Belotti almost scored after the break but Sassuolo goalkeeper Andrea Consigli denied his overhead kick.

The Torino captain grabbed the equaliser on 56 minutes, but Sassuolo charged back with Jeremie Boga racing down the flank to force a Salvatore Sirigu save, only for Pol Lirola to turn in the rebound with a back-heel flick.

Simone Zaza pulled Torino back into the game on 81 minutes with Belotti sealing victory with another overhead kick which this time found the back of the net a minute later for his eighth goal in the last ten league games, to bring his tally to 15.

The three points could also be vital for Torino's Europa League hopes, with their final two games against struggling Empoli and Lazio.

Sassuolo are sitting in tenth position.

Empoli kept their hopes of Serie A survival alive with a 2-1 win at Sampdoria.

Fabio Quagliarella pulled a goal back for Sampdoria converting a penalty in injury time to take his Serie A leading tally to 26 goals – five more than Juventus star Ronaldo.

SPOTLIGHT

Hughton sacked as Brighton manager

Reuters
London

Chris Hughton was sacked as manager of Brighton and Hove Albion after four-and-a-half years at the helm, the Premier League club said in a statement yesterday.

Hughton led Brighton into the top flight in 2017, ending a 34-year absence, and they have just survived their second season despite failing to win any of their last nine games.

"Undoubtedly, this has been one of the most difficult decisions I have had to make as chairman of Brighton and Hove Albion, but ultimately one I have made due to how we struggled in the second half of the season," chairman Tony Bloom said.

"Chris has done an excellent job, first stabilising our club, reaching the play-offs in his first full season, securing our first ever promotion to the Premier League, and retaining our status in successive seasons."

Hughton's final game in charge was Sunday's 4-1 home defeat by title-winning Manchester City.

Brighton, who reached this season's FA Cup semi-final, ended two points above the relegation zone with 36 points.

"Our run of three wins from 23 Premier League matches put our status at significant risk," Bloom added.

"It is with that in mind, and the performances during that period, that I now feel it's the right time for a change."

Hughton is the seventh Premier League manager to lose his job this season. The club also confirmed that his assistant Paul Trollope and first-team coach Paul Nevin had also left.

FOCUS

La Liga in danger from 'Super League', says Tebas

Reuters
Madrid

Spain's La Liga is in danger because of a proposal from European soccer body UEFA to create a Champions League that would be largely closed off to outsiders, its president Javier Tebas said yesterday.

UEFA is working with the European Club Association (ECA), whose members includes Europe's biggest clubs, to redesign the Champions League from 2024 onwards but has not given any details on proposals, saying discussions are at an early stage.

However, sources with knowledge of the matter have told Reuters that there was a concrete proposal to create a European league with three divisions, with promotion and relegation between each.

The top division would be the equivalent of the current Champions League and would have 32 teams, but divided into four groups of eight rather than eight groups of four. This would mean teams playing 14 group stage games instead of six.

Twenty-four teams would qualify automatically for the following year's competition with four more promoted from the second tier – currently the Europa League – and only four places open to champions of Europe's 54 domestic leagues.

This would break with the tradition that teams qualify for European competition through their domestic leagues.

"They are talking about a reform of the Champions, but really it is a new com-

"The problem is that the discussions are taking place between the clubs and UEFA and that would mean a closed league under the umbrella of UEFA"

petition. The (domestic) leagues have been the way of qualifying for the Champions League but that won't be the case any more," Tebas said during a programme on the Gol television channel.

"A number of clubs will be established who are always among the 32. On a scale out of 10, my level of worry is seven to eight."

"Is La Liga in danger? Yes, without doubt. UEFA can't do this and we want to convince other institutions that this cannot go ahead. We are working on a strategy."

Referring to the proposed competition as a Super League, he added: "The broadcast rights in Europe will change. There will be less money to share around the other clubs...and, in four or five years, the inequality will be enormous."

Last week, Lars-Christer Olsson, head of the European Leagues umbrella grouping which includes La Liga, said the current situation was more worrying than in the 1990s, when the top clubs threatened to form a breakaway league.

"The problem is that the discussions are taking place between the clubs and UEFA and that would mean a closed league under the umbrella of UEFA," he said.

Both Olsson and Tebas have said that only a small number of big clubs are in favour of the reported UEFA proposals.

UEFA could not immediately be reached for comment.

SPOTLIGHT

England set to rest Buttler for third ODI against Pakistan

Denly may take the place of Buttler as captain Morgan rotates the squad



England's Jos Buttler trains at the Bristol County Ground yesterday. (Reuters)

By Vic Marks
The Guardian

England continue to shuffle their pack during preparations for the World Cup, which have gone well for all but Alex Hales. The team have been tested in all three of their international games but have won them all. Now they are in Bristol, a venue that offers mixed memories. The precise composition of the XI for the third ODI against Pakistan today is unclear but one thing is certain: the squad will not be winding down at the Mbaro nightclub afterwards. Jofra Archer and Adil Rashid are almost certain to be missing – neither practised yesterday – and it is likely Jos Buttler will be keeping his powder dry, which would enable Jonny Bairstow to have an outing with the gloves. It is hard to keep track but, though Bairstow is now reinstated as the Test keeper, he is the reserve in the ODI squad.

The expectation is Joe Denly may take the place of Buttler at a ground that is now so small that Eoin Morgan is reluctant to play more than one specialist spinner – Bristol used to be one of the largest grounds in the country until the developers set to work.

Morgan may opt for an extra bowler, which makes sense on several levels. Much is often made about the depth of England's batting but this applies only if those players are in some sort of form. One of the goals over the next fortnight must be to ensure Ben Stokes, Moeen Ali, Chris Woakes and Archer have some batting time.

Jason Roy is bound to play. So, too, is Morgan, who will become England's most capped ODI cricketer. Roy made 87 at

Southampton, which would satisfy most batsmen, but he was hardly ecstatic about that innings. "OK is the right word," he said. "I was not quite myself. There was certainly a bit of rustiness there."

Still, 87 is not a bad return when a little short of form. Even better, the back spasms have disappeared. "The back actually feels way better than before," Roy said. "I should have had the injection earlier. There are absolutely no worries at all now."

There was one shot at Southampton, an extra cover drive off Faheem Ashraf that went for six, that was a mini-turning point, which is often the way. One shot can transform a batsman's confidence. Roy was asked whether he had ever hit a ball more sweetly. "No. That's as good as it gets. Sorry, lads. I've played that shot before and maybe got out a couple of times. I guess it was just instinct. I was struggling a little bit and then it was nice to get one out of the sweet spot and I felt good from there."

Roy is looking to capitalise in Bristol but, like most of the England team, he is wary of looking too far ahead. The armchair strategists wonder whether he could have an impact on the Ashes series. He would like to but said: "My focus is on tomorrow and the rest of this series so that I'm in the right state mentally and physically. The weight of runs will come hopefully and, if the [Ashes] call comes, then brilliant."

England are confident Jimmy Anderson has not sustained any long-term damage after limping out of Lancashire's Royal London Cup defeat by Hampshire on Sunday. The paceman is "a little sore" after being struck on the knee by a straight drive.

FOCUS

Captain Dhoni eyes Chennai clean-out after losing IPL final

AFP
Hyderabad

Chennai Super Kings skipper MS Dhoni suggested his ageing side needs a shake-up after they lost a nail-biting Indian Premier League final to archrivals Mumbai Indians. The thriller saw Mumbai edge out Chennai on Sunday after Australian Shane Watson was run out going for an unlikely second run in the final over to end a blistering 59-ball innings at 80.

Chennai then needed two runs off the last ball to overtake Mumbai's 149-8. But Sri Lanka paceman Lasith Malinga trapped Shardul Thakur lbw to claim a record fourth title for Mumbai. "We need to go back and reflect as to how we reached the finals. I don't think it was one of those years where we played really good cricket and we got into the finals," said Dhoni.

"After the World Cup, once we come back, that's the time we get to the drawing board and see what can be done to fill the gaps. Nothing against the bowlers, but batting could have been better," said Dhoni, whose team has won three IPL titles from eight finals.

None of Chennai's batsmen made it to the top-10 scorers list in this year's IPL, India's cash-rich domestic Twenty20 showpiece tournament. Dhoni – 37

but still a key member of India's World Cup squad – was Chennai's best with 416 runs, including three fifties.

Watson's return to the IPL next season was already uncertain after the 37-year-old bid farewell to Australia's Big Bash early this year. The Australian all-rounder and Dhoni are among the 11 members of the 25-man Chennai squad aged over 30.

Dhoni was run out in Sunday's final for two, leaving the defending champions in trouble at 82-4. "We committed a lot of mistakes and Mumbai Indians also did the same and at the end of the day the winning team was the one that made one mistake less than the other team," said Dhoni, adding that his immediate focus is on the 50-over World Cup starting later this month in England and Wales.

Kieron Pollard smashed an unbeaten 41 off 25 deliveries for Mumbai while paceman Jasprit Bumrah returned figures of 2-14 from his four overs. The Rohit Sharma-led Mumbai were the team to beat this year in the world's most popular T20 league, ending top of the table after 14 league games.

"We played some good cricket. Good to see we qualified in the top two," said Sharma. "Our bowling in this tournament was excellent. At different stages, our bowlers put their hands up and brought us back in the game."



Mumbai Indians' Rohit Sharma (left) and Chennai Super Kings captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni pose before the IPL final. (AFP)

PRAISE

Tendulkar calls Bumrah best bowler around after IPL exploits



Mumbai Indians fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah (right) celebrates after taking the wicket of Chennai Super Kings batsman Ambati Rayudu during the Indian Premier League final in Hyderabad on Sunday night. (AFP)

Reuters
New Delhi

Jasprit Bumrah's death-overs mastery in Sunday's Indian Premier League (IPL) final has convinced batting great Sachin Tendulkar that the 25-year-old with an unorthodox action is currently the best bowler in world cricket.

Mumbai Indians mentor Tendulkar watched contentedly from the sidelines as Bumrah stifled Chennai Super Kings with his final two overs to help set up his team's nail-biting one-run victory with remarkable figures of 4-0-14-2.

"Let me go on record and say he is the best bowler in the world at this stage and his best is yet to come hopefully," Tendulkar said of the bowler who will have to play a key role in

England if India are to win a third 50-overs World Cup in July.

Lasith Malinga had bled 20 runs in the previous over when Bumrah returned for his final two overs after conceding just six in his first two overs which also produced the wicket of Ambati Rayudu. Chennai needed 42 off 24 balls but the 17th over yielded only four as Bumrah straitjacketed Watson and Dwayne Bravo denying them any boundary.

Watson, who hit a chancy 80 in a losing cause, clobbered three successive sixes in the next over from spinner Krunal Pandya to leave Chennai needing 18 from the last two overs. Bumrah returned to dismiss Bravo and gave away only five runs in his first five deliveries before stumper Quinton de Kock conceded four byes. "I think his action is a bit awkward and it's tough to understand what pace is coming," his Mumbai team-

mate Yuvraj Singh said. "I think he's bowling the best I've seen in his career."

Equally impressive was how Bumrah dealt with heartbreaks in the nail-biting final. The bowler with sling-arm action kept his cool even when Rahul Chahar dropped Watson and put his arm around de Kock's shoulders to comfort the dejected wicketkeeper who had conceded the late bye which could have cost them the trophy.

Asked about the secret of his consistency, Bumrah attributed it to a combination of simple approach and self-confidence. "I don't think about all those things. I just think one day at a time, one ball at a time," said the top-ranked ODI bowler.

"If you don't think about all those extra pressure, you are much clearer, you don't feel the pressure. So I tried to focus on that, and I tried to back myself in any situation."

TRI-SERIES

Bangladesh beat West Indies to set up final rematch

AFP
Dublin

Bangladesh beat the West Indies by five wickets in the one-day international Tri-Series yesterday to set up a final rematch between the teams in Dublin. Ireland's hopes of reaching the final were ended by the result and the tournament hosts now face Bangladesh in a dead rubber tomorrow.

Both Mushfiqur Rahim (63) and Soumya Sarkar (54) hit half-centuries as Bangladesh reached their target of 248 with five wickets and 16 balls to spare. West Indies had elected to bat and scored 247-9 in their 50 overs, with Shai Hope (87) and Jason Holder (62) leading the way.

But Mustafizur Rahman's first four-wicket haul in eight months and Mashrafe Mortaza's three wickets stole the momentum for Bangladesh. Soumya's quick-fire innings came off 67 balls to get Bangladesh's run chase off to a fast start.

After they had lost three wickets in the middle-overs to Ashley Nurse, Mushfiqur put together two key partnerships. Mushfiqur and Mohamed Mithun hit 83 for the fourth wicket before he and Mahmudullah put on 50 for fifth wicket to pave the way for the victory. The Windies have now lost twice to Bangladesh in a week and will be hoping for revenge in Friday's final.

Bangladesh captain Mortaza praised the bowler's performance. "The way we're playing, I think we bowled really well. We didn't start well, but luckily we got the breakthrough. In the



Bangladesh bowler Mustafizur Rahman (right) appeals successfully for leg before wicket against West Indies' Raymon Reifer during the tri-nation ODI series in Dublin yesterday. (AFP)

middle part Mustafizur bowled well, and Shakib and Miraz too. Getting to the final was the most important thing. The boys are a bit relaxed, but two matches left, and we'll go hard, and see how it goes in the final," he said.

West Indies skipper Jason Holder was not happy with fielding and said there is lot to improve before the final.

"Still not 100% in the field. We've definitely let ourselves down with our fielding right through the tournament. We just

want to improve every time we step onto the field. We were a few runs short. I'm not one to look at the end result, we need to look at the processes and tighten up in all three departments," he said.

BRIEF SCORES

At Dublin: West Indies 247-9 in 50 overs (S Hope 87, J Holder 62; Mustafizur 4-43) **lost to Bangladesh 248-5 in 47.2 overs** (Mushfiqur 63, Soumya 54; A Nurse 3-53) by five wickets

BASKETBALL

Toronto Raptors and Trail Blazers enter NBA final four

'I got some loft on it and it made the ball bounce soft and it ended up going in'

AFP
Los Angeles

Kawhi Leonard bounced in the game-winning shot at the buzzer as the Toronto Raptors advanced to the Eastern Conference finals with a 92-90 win over the visiting Philadelphia 76ers in a heart-stopping game seven on Sunday.

The winner-take-all contest was a microcosm of the wildly unpredictable series with each team taking turns making runs or being inept until the biggest twist of all as Leonard finished it off in showstopping style.

"I got a fortuitous bounce," said Leonard of the first game-seven buzzer beater in NBA history.

"I just shot it as hard as I could. I got some loft on it and it made the ball bounce soft and it ended up going in."

The Raptors advance to the NBA final four where they will play the top-seeded Milwaukee Bucks in game one of their series tomorrow.

With the score tied 90-90 and the game appearing to be headed to overtime, Leonard took matters into his own hands by getting open for a fall-away jumper from the right corner.

His arching moon ball at the buzzer bounced twice on each side of the rim before dropping into the bucket to clinch the series.

Leonard's winning shot came after Sixers Jimmy Butler tied the contest with four seconds left.

Leonard finished with a game high 41 points while Pascal Siakam tallied 11 points and 11 rebounds for the Raptors, who are hoping to reach their first NBA finals in franchise history.

Toronto has leaned heavily on Leonard all season, and on Sunday he delivered. Serge Ibaka had 17 points, Kyle Lowry chipped in 10 and Marc Gasol grabbed 11 rebounds.

Joel Embiid led the Sixers attack with 21 points and 11 rebounds and Tobias Harris had 15 points and 10 rebounds.

The Raptors were up 89-85 with 74 seconds to play on a steal by Lowry, who set up Siakam for the layup.

Butler made one of two free throws, cutting the lead to three. With 12 seconds to play, Joel Embiid made two free throws to trim the lead to one, 89-88.

Leonard had a chance to give Toronto a three-point lead but made just one of two free throws with 10 seconds remaining, and



Toronto Raptors forward Kawhi Leonard (centre) celebrates with teammates after making the game winning basket against Philadelphia during game seven of the second round of the 2019 NBA playoffs at Scotiabank Arena. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

Butler tied the score 90-90 on a desperation driving layup. "I was disappointed I missed that free throw," Leonard said. "So I really wanted to make that shot. I wanted to leave it all out on the floor just in case we lost so I would have been proud of myself."

CJ McCollum carried the load in the other winner-take-all NBA playoff game on Sunday night, as the Portland Trail Blazers also won a tight game seven over the Denver Nuggets 100-96.

Portland rallied on the back of McCollum's 37 points to stun the Nuggets in Denver and

book a Western Conference finals date with NBA champions Golden State. With Portland star Damian Lillard struggling to get shots to fall, Denver exploded out of the gates, seizing a 29-17 first-quarter lead that they stretched to as much as 17 in the second period.

McCollum kept the Blazers in it, his driving basket giving them their first lead of the game, 71-70 with 12 seconds left in the third quarter.

The Nuggets had reduced a seven-point deficit to one when McCollum drained a step-back jumper with 12.4 seconds left to stretch Portland's lead to 98-

95.

Evan Turner, who scored just four points in the first six games of the series, scored 10 of his 14 in the fourth quarter for Portland.

After Nikola Jokic's last-gasp three-point attempt hit the rim Turner grabbed the rebound and the clock ran down.

Despite the third-quarter departure of Rodney Hood with a hyperextended knee, Portland booked their first trip to the conference finals since 2000.

They'll open their best-of-seven series against the Warriors on Tuesday with a place in the NBA finals on the line.

Despite his shooting woes, Lillard contributed with 10 rebounds and eight assists to go with his 13 points. He connected on just three of 17 shots from the floor - but that included two three-pointers in the fourth quarter.

"I think for us the biggest thing was just to take it one possession at a time," McCollum said.

"We came out a little tight defensively... Our biggest thing was just one stop at a time, one possession at a time."

Jokic led Denver with 29 points. Jamal Murray had 14 points on four-of-18 shooting.

MLB

Tanaka outpitches Snell as Yanks beat Rays

Reuters
St. Petersburg

Masahiro Tanaka won an early pitching duel as the New York Yankees defeated the host Tampa Bay Rays 7-1 on Sunday afternoon.

The Yankees have won six straight three-game series, taking the rubber contest in this matchup. They moved to within one-half game of the Rays in the American League East.

Rays left-hander Blake Snell (3-4) took the loss. The reigning AL Cy Young winner, who went 21-5 last year, struck out 12 batters - one short of his career high in just 5 2/3 innings, allowing four hits, two walks and two runs. All 12 strikeouts were swinging - seven on his fastball and five on his curve.

Tanaka (3-3) wasn't as flashy as Snell. But Tanaka - who is 9-4 in his career against the Rays - struck out seven and allowed just five hits and no walks in seven innings. He also retired 12 consecutive batters from the second through the sixth innings and fired first-pitch strikes to 19 of the 26 hitters he faced. In all, Tanaka required just 73 pitches, 55 for strikes.

The game marked the major league debut for Rays catcher Anthony Bembboom, who went 0-for-2. Bembboom, a 22nd-round pick of the Angels in 2012, is the oldest player to make his MLB debut for the Rays (age 29). Snell was perfect for the first three innings, striking out seven of the nine batters he faced.

However, the Yankees broke out to a 2-0 lead in the fifth. With two outs and nobody on, Austin Romine stroked a line-drive double to left-centre, and he scored on Mike Tauchman's double off the wall in centre that missed being a home run by a few inches. DJ LeMahieu then poked an opposite-field single to right to score Tauchman.

That snapped Snell's 10-inning scoreless streak during which he had allowed just two hits and one walk while striking out 19. Tampa Bay cut its deficit to 2-1 in the sixth on Austin Meadows' eighth homer of the season. He golfed a low sinker that travelled 418 feet to right-centre.

New York extended its lead to 3-1 in the eighth. Luke Voit drew a leadoff walk, advanced to second on a Brett Gardner single and to third on a groundout. Reliever Ryne Stanek then threw a wild pitch over Bembboom, and Voit slid home to score on a close play.

Tampa Bay put runners on second and third with one out in the bottom of the eighth, but Yankees reliever Zack Britton escaped by striking out two straight batters. The Yankees put the game away with four runs in the ninth - all of it after a 43-minute power-outage delay inside domed Tropicana Field.

RESULTS

Dodgers	6-0	Nationals
Yankees	7-1	Rays
Cubs	4-1	Brewers
Red Sox	11-2	Mariners
Pirates	10-6	Cardinals
Astros	15-5	Rangers
Giants	6-5	Reds
Indians	5-3	Athletics
Rockies	10-7	Padres
Phillies	6-1	Royals
White Sox	5-1	Blue Jays
Braves	5-3	D'backs
Tigers	5-3	Twins
Orioles	5-1	Angels

RYU FLIRTS WITH NO-HITTER AS DODGERS WIN

Ryu Hyun-jin no-hit the Washington batting lineup for 7 1/3 innings as the Los Angeles Dodgers blanked the Nationals 6-0 in a Major League Baseball contest on Sunday.

Ryu threw eight shutout innings to stretch his overall shutout streak to 24 innings. He allowed one hit, struck out nine and walked just one.

South Korea's Ryu was coming off a complete-game shutout in a 9-0 win against the Atlanta Braves earlier in the week.

He improved to 5-1 on the season as he needed only 93 pitches in that win but threw a career-high 116 against Washington.

Corey Seager belted a grand slam in the bottom of the eighth and drove in five runs for the Dodgers.

Washington's Gerardo Parra ended Ryu's no-hit bid with a ground-rule double to left-centre field with one out in the eighth.



New York Yankees' Masahiro Tanaka (right) celebrates with teammate CC Sabathia at the end of the first inning against the Tampa Bay Rays at Tropicana Field. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

NHL

Bruins clobber Hurricanes to take 2-0 lead

AFP
Los Angeles

Matt Grzelcyk scored two goals as the Boston Bruins won their fifth straight NHL playoff game with a 6-2 victory over the Carolina Hurricanes to take a 2-0 lead in the Eastern Conference finals.

Tuukka Rask easily won the goal-tending battle Sunday, making 21 saves as the Bruins won both games to start the best-of-seven series on home ice. "We just managed the puck well early," said Grzelcyk. "It was nice to get a few goals in the first period. It forced them to get aggressive and we were able to capitalize on our opportunities."

Grzelcyk grew up in Boston and his mother was at the Boston Garden on Mother's Day. "It is special. I talk to her every day," said Grzelcyk. "I wouldn't be in the position I am without her and my family." The series now shifts to Raleigh, North Carolina, for game three today. The

Hurricanes have won all their games at PNC Arena these playoffs and are the only team in the NHL post-season that has not lost on home ice.

Jake DeBrusk, David Backes, Danton Heinen and Connor Clifton, with his first NHL goal, also scored for the Bruins in front of the home crowd of 17,500.

Justin Williams and Teuvo Teravainen scored the goals for Carolina who had their six-game winning streak snapped in game one. Net-minder Petr Mrazek struggled in a 19-save performance. Mrazek over aggressive style allowed him to often make the first save, but when he couldn't get back into position the Bruins would jump on the rebound and score into an empty net.

At one point Mrazek had given up 10 straight goals in the series but rookie head coach Rod Brind'Amour refused to pull his No. 1 goalie and replace him with backup Curtis McElhinney. Brind'Amour has never pulled a goaltender mid-game in his brief NHL coaching career.

He said he considered pulling

Mrazek but the goaltender said he wanted to stay in the game. "We talked about it. But he doesn't want to come out," Brind'Amour said. "A lot of other guys on the bench deserve to come out if that's what we're doing. That's not how we do it."

Carolina was known this year for their over-the-top post game celebrations after a regular season wins, but they can't seem to even buy a goal at this point of the playoffs. Both their goals Sunday came late in the third with the game already out of reach.

"We certainly don't think we can't do it," Williams said of coming back in the series. "If they are going to advance, we're certainly going to make it as tough as we can on them, and it won't be easy."

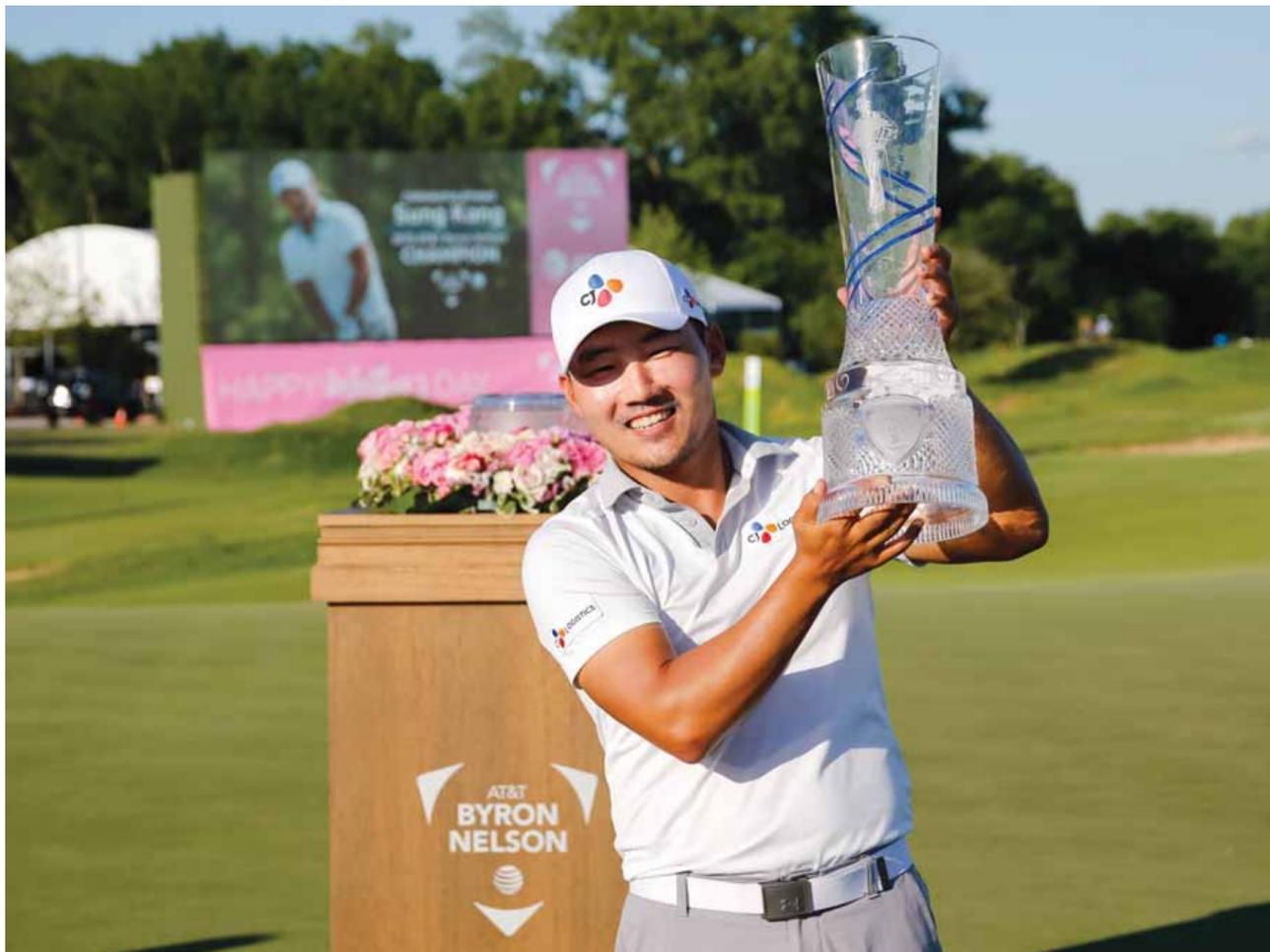
Matt Grzelcyk (third right) of the Boston Bruins celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal against Carolina Hurricanes in game two of the Eastern Conference Final during the NHL Stanley Cup playoffs. (AFP)



SPOTLIGHT

Kang captures first US PGA Tour title at Byron Nelson

'Yesterday we finished too late. I didn't have time to sleep much, only slept about three hours'



Sung Kang holds the trophy after winning the AT&T Byron Nelson golf tournament at Trinity Forest Golf Club. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

AFP
Los Angeles

South Korea's Kang Sung fired seven birdies in a four-under par 67 on Sunday to claim his first US PGA Tour victory, a two-shot win over Matt Every in the Byron Nelson in Dallas, Texas.

Kang drained a 23-foot birdie putt at 15 to take the lead for good on a marathon day that saw the leaders play 27 holes thanks to the six-hour weather delay on Saturday. Kang, who equalled the Trinity Forest course record with a bogey-free 10-under 61 on Friday, finished with a 23-un-

der par total of 261. Every had edged ahead by one through nine holes when darkness halted play on Saturday.

But Kang fired three birdies and bogey over the final nine holes of the third round to regain a three-shot lead. Every responded with seven birdies - including five on the front nine - in a five-under par 66 in the fourth round.

But he was unable to maintain the lead and his 21-under total of 263 was only good enough for a share of second place alongside compatriot Scott Piercy.

Piercy capped a bogey-free tournament - the first on the US PGA Tour since 2010 - with a seven-under 64. Kang strung

together three straight birdies at eight, nine and 10. He was unable to get up and down from a green side bunker at the 12th, but he reeled off another trio of birdies at 14, 15 and 16 to move to 24-under for the tournament.

He was three strokes up when he arrived at 18, where his closing bogey proved immaterial.

"I'm so happy right now," Kang said after notching his first tour win in his 159th start.

"Yesterday we finished too late," Kang said. "I didn't have time to sleep much, only slept about three hours."

Because he knew it would be hard to concentrate, Kang said he told his caddie "I just wanted

to be chill and having some fun and then when my turn came just try to really focus in - and it worked out great."

World number three Brooks Koepka finished strong, carding a six-under par 65 to finish alone in fourth on 20-under 264 heading into his PGA Championship title defense at Bethpage Black next week.

LEADING FINAL-ROUND SCORES

261-Kang Sung (KOR) 65-61-68-67
263-Matt Every 65-65-67-66,
Scott Piercy 67-69-63-64
264-Brooks Koepka 65-66-68-65
267-Peter Uihlein 69-71-63-64,

Kiradech Aphibarnrat (THA) 69-68-66-64, Rory Sabbatini (SVK) 67-65-68-67, Tyler Duncan 64-66-70-67, Matt Jones (AUS) 65-70-65-67

268-Justin Harding 66-73-64-65, Sebastian Munoz 69-66-65-68
269-Pat Perez 67-71-67-64,
Carlos Ortiz (MEX) 69-69-66-65,
Padraig Harrington 69-69-66-65,
Nicholas Lindheim 70-69-62-68,
Doug Ghim 69-66-66-68

270-Vaughn Taylor 69-67-68-66,
Kramer Hickok 65-73-66-66,
Stephan Jaeger (GER) 69-66-67-68
271-Jonas Blixt (SWE) 65-70-70-66, Henrik Stenson (SWE) 67-69-66-69, Shawn Stefani 65-72-64-70

PREVIEW

All eyes on Woods even if Koepka the one to beat



Tiger Woods of the United States looks on during a practice round prior to the PGA Championship at Bethpage Black in Bethpage, New York, yesterday. (Getty Images/AFP)

Reuters
New York

Defending champion Brooks Koepka is the one to beat at this week's PGA Championship even if Tiger Woods will have the boisterous New York galleries on side as one of golf's four major tournaments begins a new era in the spring.

After being held since 1972 in the dog days of summer, the PGA Championship's move to May should ensure milder weather and more attention from U.S. sports fans whose thoughts by August have invariably turned to American football. For the first time ever in a major championship, every player ranked in the top 100 in the world will tee it up, barring late withdrawals.

The field will comprise 156 players, but 155 of them will be in the supporting cast as one man takes centre stage.

Tiger-mania is back in full force after he ended his decade-plus major drought by winning the Masters last month, and Woods is one of the favourites on a course where he lifted the US Open trophy in 2002.

But big, brawny Bethpage, a 7,459-yard course in Farmingdale on Long Island, is arguably less suited for his 43-year-old game than the other major venues this year.

While not short off the tee, Woods is no longer among the game's biggest hitters after his 2017 spinal fusion.

He may have to let rip with his driver to hoist the Wanamaker Trophy a fifth time, adding to his previous successes in 1999, 2000, 2006 and 2007. Fifty players are averaging 300 yards or more on the PGA Tour this year.

Woods, at 299 yards, is respectable, but gone are the days when he could overpower a course. He now gets the job done the old fashioned way, by relentlessly hitting greens in regulation. At 75 percent, Woods is the year's best on tour at it, which could prove

decisive at Bethpage. Legitimate title chances will line up like jets at nearby JFK airport, but anyone with designs on winning will likely have to contend with the quiet assassin Koepka, who for all his dominance in recent majors remains less than a crowd favourite.

Koepka and Woods have developed a close rivalry at the majors, with Koepka heading a 1-2 finish at the PGA at Belvedere before Woods turned the tables at Augusta, where he clinched his 15th major title.

The stoic Koepka does not stand out as superior in any single category of the game, but is good across the board, and his mind is perhaps his best weapon, seemingly immune to pressure.

Others with the goods to contend include Europeans Rory McIlroy, Justin Rose, Jon Ram and Tommy Fleetwood, and Americans Dustin Johnson, Justin Thomas and Rickie Fowler. McIlroy would likely be the outright favourite if he were not coming off another disappointing Sunday, the latest in the final round at the Wells Fargo Championship, where he shot an error-strewn closing 73. His putter let him down at Quail Hollow, not for the first time. If the Northern Irishman can get that right he can win at Bethpage.

Rahm, coming off victory in the two-man teams event at the Zurich Classic, is tipped to win a major sooner or later.

The 2016 US Open winner Johnson needs to add to his single major triumph if he wants to end his career with a haul his talent deserves.

However difficult predicting the winner, expect one of the big names to come through, just like the last time the PGA Championship was held on Long Island in 1926.

It was won then by one of the greats of the era, the legendary, hard-partying Walter Hagen. The total purse then was \$11,000. This week's purse has not been announced but it will be about \$11 million more than 93 years ago.

FOCUS

Spieth says he is close to top form, but critics not so sure

Reuters
New York

Jordan Spieth will have a third opportunity to complete the career grand slam at the PGA Championship this week, but his form is a far cry from that which saw him ranked third in the world as recently as this time last year.

Spieth has not won since the 2017 British Open and, more troubling, has not even contended at any tournament he has played this year.

He showed glimpses of his old self at the Byron Nelson tournament in his home city of Dallas at the weekend, but ultimately finished a disappointing equal 29th after a mediocre final round.

Spieth says that he is happy with every part of his game except his driving and that he is close to getting that area back to where he wants it. "I really think I've done a good job now of embracing the struggle," he said last week.

"My last four to six starts, I've been a couple of tee balls away from really having a chance to win and that's without feeling like I had my best stuff."

"So, just tightening up the tee game is really the key at this point. The rest of it is really coming together."

Several former players, however, are not quite so sure a return to form for Spieth is just around the corner.

"He talks about getting comfortable and all sorts of things but it just doesn't look comfortable for me," six-times major champion Nick Faldo said during a conference call last week for CBS television, which will screen the PGA Championship in the United States.

"I watch his hip action, and his leg action, the whole action which leads to balance and power. To me that just doesn't seem right and that's why he's got... the two-way miss."

"He can block it right and pull it left with the driver." The two-way miss refers to the dreaded affliction of wondering which side of the fairway

you are going to miss with your bad shots.

Spieth, 29, almost completed the calendar grand slam in 2015, winning the Masters and US Open before contending but falling just short at the British Open and PGA Championship.

His iron play was magnificent back then, his short game sublime and his putting unparalleled, particularly from mid-range. He sank so many 20-footers, they began to look almost routine.

Those days are long gone.

"The putting woes have been well-documented. He doesn't have the same confidence because he's now seen an awful lot of misses his last 18 months," said Faldo.

Golf Channel analyst Brandel Chamblee also wonders whether Spieth, who won a third major at the 2017 British Open, will ever find his way back to his previous heights.

"His golf swing has changed so much, it's almost been completely stripped of all of its athleticism," Chamblee said recently.

"Spieth was one of the best drivers of the ball his first couple of years on the PGA Tour. People now just think of him as a poor driver of the golf ball."

"It looks to me like he's in a very tough spot. Who knows if he'll ever find his way back? A lot of people who go down that road can't remember how to get back home."

As for Spieth's putting, former British Open champion Ian Baker-Finch has noticed the Texan change his routine.

"When you feel a little anxious or confused with aim it throws off your routine and that's what it looks like to me," Australian Baker-Finch, a master putter in his day, told Reuters.

What this will all add up to next week is open to question, but Faldo does not expect it to be pretty.

"It seems like golf's hard work from three or four years ago," he said. Spieth, however, is shrugging off the criticism.

"There's a lot of experts out there that actually have no idea what they're saying," he said.



Jordan Spieth of the United States plays his shot from the second tee during the final round of the AT&T Byron Nelson at Trinity Forest Golf Club in Dallas, Texas. (Getty Images/AFP)

TENNIS

Returning Serena starts campaign with routine Rome win

'I really, really, actually desperately wanted to be on the tour and to be playing, but it hasn't been able to work out. It felt good to finally be back out. Hopefully I'll be able to keep it up'



US' Serena Williams hits a return to Sweden's Rebecca Peterson during their Rome Open match at the Foro Italico in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Rome

Serena Williams made a winning return from injury beating Swedish qualifier Rebecca Petersen 6-4, 6-2 to advance to the second round of the Italian Open clay-court tournament yesterday.

Williams, 37, has not played since a hard-fought three-set win over Petersen in the second round at the Miami Open in March before withdrawing with a knee injury.

The 23-time Grand Slam winner - now ranked 11th - also withdrew from Indian Wells in March complaining of illness.

Watched by her husband Alexis Ohanian, Williams sealed victory on her second

match point against her 64th-ranked opponent after 76 minutes on court in the tournament which acts as a warm-up for the French Open in two weeks' time.

"I felt good, I wasn't sure how it was going to feel," said Williams, who hit 10 aces.

"It's been a while, I haven't played a tonne of matches this year, not by choice, just by force.

"I really, really, actually desperately wanted to be on the tour and to be playing, but it hasn't been able to work out.

"It felt good to finally be back out. Hopefully I'll be able to keep it up.

"I got here pretty early really, I wanted to get used to the conditions and 'real clay' and it was good I did that."

Petersen looked set to push

the former world number one going 3-1 up in the first set, but 10th-seeded Williams won five of the next six games.

She broke twice more in the second and survived two break points against her while serving for the match, sealing victory after double-faulting on her first match point.

She will play her older sister Venus, who defeated Elise Mertens 7-5, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4) yesterday, in the second round. It will be their first meeting on European clay in nearly 17 years.

Williams admitted it has been a struggle to maintain her fitness as she recovered from injury.

"I haven't been able to train or practice a lot, I was out much longer than I expected," she explained. "I did everything I could to stay fit and keep my

cardio up. "I love the clay season and wanted to do everything to be a part of it and I'm here.

"I've just been on this diet basically. It's been awful. When you're sedentary, it becomes hard to manage your body. So it's just basically you have to eat grass.

"It was a nightmare. But it worked and it paid off. I feel like I'm taking it one day at a time.

"For me obviously it's about playing well at all the big moments, including this tournament because it is a big moment.

"Obviously the slams, just getting ready for those events."

A four-time Rome winner, Williams last won on the red clay of the Foro Italico in 2016.

She is preparing for the French Open later this month where a third title on clay at

Roland Garros would see her match Margaret Court's record of 24 major singles titles.

In the meantime, she is enjoying sharing her favourite sites in Rome with her daughter Olympia who turns two in September.

"It's really fun because I took her to the Colosseum, then I took her to the (Trevi) fountain," she said.

"It was really cool to share my favourite city with her, some of my favourite things to see. Obviously the pasta and the food.

"Now when I go to tournaments, I really kind of want to get there early so I can have these different experiences and photos and videos and memories with Olympia.

"She might not remember it, but at least we'll be able to see it in the future."

ATHLETICS

South Africa instructs athletics body to appeal Semenya decision

Reuters
Pretoria

The South African government said yesterday it was instructing the country's athletics governing body to appeal against the Court of Arbitration for Sport decision on female eligibility that directly affects their Olympic champion Caster Semenya.

Yet Athletics South Africa (ASA) maintained silence on the matter with sources telling Reuters they were still considering their options and would not be issuing any statement until ready.

Any appeal would have to be made by the end of the month to the Swiss Federal Tribunal.

Sport minister Tokozile Xasa, who has no direct authority over ASA, said in a statement she was making the instruction after receiving advice from a high-level panel.

The panel had met to discuss the way forward after CAS ruled that the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) could go ahead with its regulations on female runners with differences of sex development (DSD).

Athletes like the double Olympic 800m champion Semenya with male XY chromosomes must now take medication to lower naturally occurring high levels of testosterone before being allowed to compete in women's races from 400m to a mile.

Xasa's claim followed a similar



call from South Africa's Olympic chiefs last week and she went a step further by confidently predicting ASA would appeal and then summarising three grounds for that appeal in her statement.

"ASA applied for recusal of two of the arbitrators who it felt were conflicted since they have handled the earlier case of the Indian sprinter Dutee Chand, as Caster was also going to be an affected athlete," the statement said.

"The strength of scientific, medical and legal case we presented, we believe, the outcome is inconceivable on the facts. The facts before (the) court and the outcome do not match.

"The pertinent legal questions that the court should have addressed we (believe were) not addressed. The court simply gave the unfettered latitude to the IAAF to do as it pleases.

"For instance, it has not been answered as to how the IAAF will implement the regulations and how ethical issues will be addressed."

MOTORSPORT

Hamilton would rather fight Ferrari than battle with teammate Bottas



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton poses with team members after winning the Spanish GP at the Circuit de Catalunya in Montmelo, Barcelona on Sunday. (AFP)

Reuters
London

Five times world champion Lewis Hamilton says Mercedes should not be blamed for their dominance and he would far rather be in a battle with Formula One rivals Ferrari and Red Bull than teammate Valtteri Bottas.

Champions Mercedes have won all five races so far this season in one-two formation, with Hamilton and Bottas also taking a fastest lap each.

The two Mercedes drivers are just seven points apart, Hamilton leading after three wins, but a gulf separates them from the rest.

"People watching might be unhappy with the gap we have to the Ferraris. Of course we want to be as quick as we can be, we don't know why the others have fallen off a little bit," Hamilton told reporters after Sunday's race.

"It's not our fault. It's not these guys' (his team mates) fault that they are really great at their job."

The Briton has in the last two seasons, when Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel was his main challenger, compared the title battle to the tennis duels fought out by Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal.

The 34-year-old has not spoken that way this year, with Bot-

tas the only man to have beaten him in what has become an internal team battle ever since the opening race in Australia.

"It's just not as much fun, for sure, as when you are competing against another team. That's what Formula One is about," said Hamilton.

"That's the exciting part, when you're competing against one or two other teams who are also bringing their A game. That puts another spanner in the mix.

"...It's awesome. But when that's not there, it's definitely a lot less exciting from a competition point of view."

Hamilton previously had Nico Rosberg, the now-retired 2016 champion in a season when Mercedes won 19 of the 21 races, as his main rival and that led to a breakdown in relations between the former friends.

Bottas is a different character, and there is still plenty of respect with team boss Toto Wolff assuring reporters there would be no repeat of 2016.

Hamilton said Mercedes were still working as hard as ever, pushing the car to the limit.

"It's not like we go to the race and because we have a margin we back off," he explained.

"We are pedal-to-the-metal, and Valtteri right there pushing all the way," he said.

"So I still have to deliver just as if a Ferrari was (right) behind me."

CYCLING

Viviani stripped of Giro stage, Gaviria new winner

AFP
Orbetello, Italy

Colombia's Fernando Gaviria of UAE Team Emirates was awarded victory on stage three of the Giro d'Italia when original winner Elia Viviani was penalised by race officials for switching trajectory mid-sprint yesterday.

"The jury watched the video footage of the sprint and has decided to relegate Elia Viviani. The winner is Fernando Gaviria," Giro organisers said.

Gaviria took the victory after 5hr 23min 19sec in the saddle ahead of France's Arnaud Demare (Groupama-FDJ) and Germany's Pascal Ackermann (Bora-Hansgrohe). For 24-year-old Gaviria it was a fifth Giro victory, having won four stages the last time he competed in 2017.

Jumbo-Visma's Slovenian rider Primož Roglic holds the overall leader's pink jersey for the third day, 19sec ahead of Britain's Simon Yates of Mitchelton-Scott with Italy's Vincenzo Nibali of Bahrain-Merida third at 23sec.



Colombia's Fernando Gaviria (centre) competes the final sprint flanked by Italy's Elia Viviani (right) during the stage three of the 102nd Giro d'Italia. (AFP)

The 219km stage got underway in Vinci, to mark the 500th anniversary of the death of Italian master painter Leonardo da Vinci, who was born in the Tus-

can town. Japan's Sho Hatsuyama lead a long solo breakaway over 144km, but the stage was marked by numerous falls with

Britain's Tao Geoghegan Hart losing more than one minute and a half.

"With only one rider in the breakaway, it made it a very long

stage," said Roglic. "It enabled me to enjoy the Maglia Rosa (pink jersey) a bit more. I wasn't really scared of the crosswinds at the end because we are a team from Holland so we know how to deal with the wind."

Today's fourth stage, one of the longest in this year's race, covers 235km from Orbetello to Frascati, south of Rome, with undulating twisting roads with the closing kilometres uphill.

RESULTS FROM STAGE 3

1. Fernando Gaviria (COL/UAE) 5hr 23min 19sec.
 2. Arnaud Demare (FRA/FDJ) same time.
 3. Pascal Ackermann (GER/BOR) s.t.
 4. Matteo Moschetti (ITA/TRE) s.t.
 5. Giacomo Nizzolo (ITA/DDT) s.t.
 6. Jakub Mareczko (ITA/CCC) s.t.
 7. Davide Cimolai (ITA/ICA) s.t.
 8. Manuel Belletti (ITA/AND) s.t.
 9. Christian Knees (GER/INE) s.t.
 10. Sacha Modolo (ITA/EFI) s.t.
 11. Simon Yates (GBR/MIT) s.t.
 12. Miguel Angel Lopez (COL/AST) s.t.
 13. Giovanni Lonardi (ITA/NIP) s.t.
 14. Vincenzo Nibali (ITA/BAH) s.t.
 15. Caleb Ewan (AUS/LOT) s.t.
- Selected:
48. Primož Roglic (SLO/JUM) s.t.

SPOTLIGHT

From playing to planning: Meet Abdulaziz al-Ishaq

'I believe I have now been able to do something for my nation; a nation which has done so much for me'

From a career as a player at Al Wakrah Sports Club in the 1970s, a university scholarship in North America before a return to his home nation to help play a key part in delivering Al Wakrah Stadium – Abdulaziz al-Ishaq has been on a fascinating journey.

He spoke to *sc.qa* about his 40-year affiliation with the club, the city and his pride in being a part of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Excerpts

Q. How proud are you to be part of this project, especially considering your affiliation with the city of Al Wakrah?

Firstly, I am so proud to be part of this landmark in the State of Qatar. I believe I have now been able to do something for my nation; a nation which has done so much for me.

I started playing for Al Wakrah when I was 13 years old. I played for the youth teams at first and did well, so I eventually got the chance to join the first team. At the beginning, I was often a substitute, but after three years I got my chance and started most games. I started as a centre back; then they pushed me to the right side and I became a wing-back.

This was in the 1970s, and by '78 and '79 I reached the peak of my performance. I was lucky enough to represent Wakrah in the Amir Cup final for two years running. We didn't win unfortunately but it was a huge honour to play in front of His Highness and represent Wakrah.

Later I got a university scholarship to study engineering in North America. The club asked me if I could stay a little bit longer because the national team was interested in selecting me, but I said I needed to go and study.

Q. When did you come back to Qatar, and how keen were you to be involved in the FIFA World Cup when Qatar won the rights to host?

It was around 1987 that I returned to Qatar and yes, absolutely, I was very determined to be part of this World



Former footballer Abdulaziz al-Ishaq poses in front of newly-built Al Wakrah Stadium.

Cup. I applied to the SC and they asked for an interview. They liked my age and experience, and said it would be helpful for me to be part of the team.

Q. Tell us about your job here...

I am part of the team which manages the stadium project. I share responsibilities with the project manager and project executive director. We are all engineers and there are certain activi-

ties that each one of us knows how to handle given the certain responsibilities and experiences that we have – so we work very well together as a team.

Q. What makes Al Wakrah Stadium so special?

You cannot compare this stadium to any other. You can only compare it to an artist sitting down with a paintbrush and creating something. It's not

something you can create automatically on a computer. It is a piece of art. We were fortunate to have worked with Zaha Hadid, such a well-known and pioneering architect around the world – and she gave us a really interesting and unique stadium. We are proud to have it here.

Q. The progress at Al Wakrah Stadium has been astounding. What do

you put this success down to?

We are fortunate for three reasons. Firstly, the contractor, the designers and everyone involved in this project is the best of the best. They are all highly experienced in this field and are specialists in what they do because they have worked on so many stadiums around the world. The second advantage is that most of the materials we use for the stadiums are local materi-

als, and therefore we get great support. Thirdly, the blockade. This was also an advantage for us because we got people moving even more materials through local markets – so things have been able to move very quickly.

Q. What does this stadium mean to the people and city of Al Wakrah?

It will become a landmark of Al Wakrah. Wakrah is an old town that has now become very much open. We have lots of shops, a mall, schools; thousands of people now live here. People used to come to Al Wakrah for the beach and for one of the best fishing spots in Qatar, but having a landmark like this for the people here is something that is greatly appreciated.

Q. How do you think you will you feel on 16 May, when His Highness The Amir cuts the ribbon at the stadium?

This is the most important moment that we are all looking forward to. I've played twice in the Amir Cup final and been honoured to get to the stage and shake hands with His Highness. This moment for a football player, it means a lot. Especially if you are a Qatari national – that he knows who you are and where you come from, with people all around watching you, it is a special moment. When he is here to open the new stadium, it will be a very special moment for us all.

Q. Can you believe that in three-and-a-half years' time, Al Wakrah will be hosting FIFA World Cup matches?

People here are waiting for this moment. They are really waiting and counting the days. I assure you Wakrah will be one of the most attractive places for all these fans to visit.

We have Souq Wakrah, we have the beach, we have some old restaurants and everything is very close to each other. People can walk around and enjoy everything very easily. Most of the Wakrah people are Qatari, and Qataris are very welcoming and generous – and love to welcome people from all around the world. (SC.qa)

RAMADAN SPORTS FESTIVAL

Table tennis tournament for specially-abled held at Aspire



Specially-abled players participate in a table tennis tournament at Aspire Zone Foundation.

For the eighth consecutive year and as part of the Ramadan Sports Festival organised by Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF), a table tennis tournament was held for specially-abled. This tournament, held in co-operation with Qatar Paralympic Committee, is the only one of its kind happening in Qatar during the holy month of Ramadan. Around 45 participants took part in the event, who were divided into four various categories: hearing, Motor, vision and mental impairments.

Prior to the start of the event participants gathered to pray for Aspire Academy graduate Abdulrahman al-Naggar, who passed away last April. Abdulrahman was one of the participants of the table tennis tournament last year, where he played an honorary match.

Salem Nasser won in the Motor impairment group, Mustafa Amin in the hearing disability group, Hamad Ali al-Marri from the visual disability team and Salman al-Sharshani in the mental disability group.

The winners were awarded their prizes by the chairman of the organising committee of the

Aspire Ramadan Sports Festival, Abdullah Aman al-Khater and the manager of the tournament, Hussain al-Haddad, from the Qatar Paralympic Committee.

Noof al-Saffar, a member of the organising committee of the festival, said: "This event holds a special place in the heart of Aspire Zone after it became one of our fixed events for the Ramadan sporting calendar. We are looking to engage all community members in sport, regardless of their skills and disabilities. I thank Qatar Paralympic Committee for their support and co-operation over the past few years. Finally, I would like to say that the doors of Aspire Zone are wide open for all, and especially members of the public with special needs."

Al-Haddad said: "We are seeking to engage more disabled players in the table tennis activities in the upcoming years. For the eighth consecutive year, we have organised a table tennis championship for disabled people, and this year's tournament is noticeable for the larger number of individuals participating. The vision loss team comprised of 14 players, the hearing disability group had 8 players, the men-

tal disability group 12 players, the motor disability group came with 3 players and we welcomed 6 players who are in wheelchairs. In conclusion, I hope that in the years to come, we engage more and more disabled players in our table tennis activities."

At the Aspire Ladies Sports Hall, the Al-Adaam team secured first place in the Women's Handball Championship, organised by AZF in co-operation with the Qatar Women's Sports Committee. Al-Majd came second and the Hands Up team came third.

The winners were awarded their prizes by Maha Al-Abd al-Jabbar, Assistant Secretary of the Qatari Women's Sports Committee and Aisha bu Jassum, member of the Organising Committee of the Festival.

At Aspire Dome, the men's volleyball tournament ended with Volley Beast securing first place, while Medina Doha came second, and Perfect Food came third. A Fitness Challenge for boys and girls and the Hockey Competitions concluded. The men's football tournament ended on Monday night, while the five-day men's basketball competition has begun.

FOCUS

Al-Tamimi launches ATA Sports Academy

Abdulla al-Tamimi is not just Qatar's top ranked squash player; he's also one of the driving forces behind the country's ambitious potential in the sport. The Aspire Academy graduate has taken a step towards fulfilling his vision, launching ATA Sports academy.

The launch was attended by several influencers and key figures, including the Director of Education and Student Affairs at Aspire Academy Badr al-Hay as well as High Jump world champion Mutaz Barshim.

Al-Tamimi also played a friendly match of squash with Barshim.

According to al-Tamimi, ATA Sports is formed with the idea of offering a "new approach" to Qatar's sports communities. The academy's mission is to create a platform that would allow the youth to explore and develop their skills. The organisation's collective experience entails Squash, Tennis, Karate, Gymnastics, Swimming and Yoga.

"I was happy to be there and support my friend Abdulla, the idea of creating a sports academy and spread the sport that he loves is amazing, and I think it will have a good impact on the society," said Barshim. This comes after an outstanding 2018 season for al-Tamimi. The 24-year-old broke into the top 30 and achieved a career-best ranking of 24th.



Abdulla al-Tamimi (left) played a friendly match of squash with High Jump world champion Mutaz Barshim during the launch of his academy.

BOTTOMLINE

Education City Golf Club adds value to membership with Pacific Links

Education City has recently joined the global golf network Pacific Links which will allow their members to avail preferred green fee pricing at over 400 courses worldwide in over 40 different countries. This benefit fits in well with the multinational demographic of the golf club whose members travel frequently to destinations for golf holidays. Likewise, inbound holiday makers whose golf clubs are part of the network will be able to play Education City Golf Club at preferred rates while holidaying in Qatar.

In addition to this it will allow Education City Golf Club to set up a number of reciprocal golf matches with other Pacific Links

member clubs in various countries such as Oman, Asia, Australia, Europe and America.

Commenting on the this initiative, Education City Golf Clubs, Director of Golf Rhys Beecher said: "This opportunity gives us the opportunity to give value back to our golf club members that have been supportive since we opened in January 2019. Our members will now have the opportunity to travel globally and save on reduced rates at leading golf courses around the world, while also supporting the tourism industry in Qatar by promoting the destination worldwide through the growing Pacific Links Network."

This agreement also helps put Qatar on the golf destination map as Education City

Golf Club will now become accessible to the Pacific Links member network of over 130,000 golfers globally. With Qatar's global air travel network Education City Golf Club looks forward to welcoming visiting golfers for a golfing break or just one round of golf when transiting through the global hub.

Michael Jamieson of Pacific Links said: "We are delighted to welcome Education City Golf Club and its members in joining our network. Education City Golf is a spectacular modern facility which I'm sure will be a popular choice for our travelling golfers and hope your members enjoy the benefits and experiences of a variety of our courses around the globe."