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NBA Page 5

Curry powers Warriors over Trail Blazers in series opener

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GULF TIMES

SPORT

GOLF

Koepka eyes 10 majors, says they are often easiest to win

Page 7

Sadd, Duhail battle for the season's last hurrah

AL WAKRAH STADIUM SET FOR EXCITING DEBUT TONIGHT AS AL SADD'S XAVI AND FERREIRA BID ADIEU AS PLAYER AND COACH AFTER AMIR CUP FINAL



A view of the brand new Al Wakrah FIFA World Cup 2022 Stadium which will host the final of the Amir Cup today. The final also marks the last match for Al Sadd captain Xavi (bottom left) and coach Jesualdo Ferreira (bottom right). **PICTURE:** Noushad Thekkayil



By Sahana Bidappa
Doha



Sadd ended Al Duhail's two-year dominance when they won the QNB Stars League title this season. It was Sadd's first under Ferreira's charge as they have played like a well-oiled machine in the season, making them favourites for the Amir Cup title.

Having said that, defending champions Duhail will be seeking to end the season with a trophy of their own. While they finished seven points behind Al Sadd in the league, they also lost to Al Rayyan on penalties in the season-opening Sheikh Jassim Cup last August.

The two times Al Sadd and Al Duhail have come face-to-face in the league this season, Ferreira's men won the first leg 3-1 while in the second Duhail were heartbroken when an own goal by substitute Murad Naji at the stroke of final whistle helped Sadd draw the encounter 2-2.

While the two are head and shoulders above rest of the teams in Qatar, there is not much to separate between them when they take on each other, which makes today's contest an intriguing one. Ferreira said there are no clear favourites in today's final. "Al Duhail are the defending champions and it is going to be a tough and intense game between the two sides," the 72-year-old said.

"The players are the most important part of the game. They are the ones who will be champions. They need to work as hard as possible to



Previous winners of Amir Cup

- 1972/73: Al Ahli
- 1973/74: Al Esteqlal
- 1974/75: Al Sadd
- 1975/76: Al Esteqlal
- 1976/77: Al Sadd
- 1977/78: Al Arabi
- 1978/79: Al Arabi
- 1979/80: Al Arabi
- 1980/81: Al Ahli
- 1981/82: Al Sadd
- 1982/83: Al Arabi
- 1983/84: Al Arabi
- 1984/85: Al Sadd
- 1985/86: Al Sadd
- 1986/87: Al Ahli
- 1987/88: Al Sadd
- 1988/89: Al Arabi
- 1989/90: Al Arabi
- 1990/91: Al Sadd
- 1991/92: Al Ahli
- 1992/93: Al Arabi
- 1993/94: Al Sadd
- 1994/95: Al Ittihad
- 1995/96: Al Ittihad
- 1996/97: Al Ittihad
- 1997/98: Al Ittihad
- 1998/99: Al Rayyan
- 1999/00: Al Sadd
- 2000/01: Al Sadd
- 2001/02: Al Ittihad
- 2002/03: Al Sadd
- 2003/04: Al Rayyan
- 2004/05: Al Sadd
- 2005/06: Al Rayyan
- 2006/07: Al Sadd
- 2007/08: Umm Salal
- 2009: Al Gharafa
- 2010: Al Rayyan
- 2011: Al Rayyan
- 2012: Al Gharafa
- 2013: Al Rayyan
- 2014: Al Sadd
- 2015: Al Sadd
- 2016: Lekhwiya
- 2017: Al Sadd
- 2018: Al Duhail

win the title. There is no clear favourite in this game, which is a knockout game with just 90 minutes, and not a number of matches. It will be a different game and an exciting final," he added.

The Portuguese coach hoped his players would give him and Xavi a triumphant farewell. "I'm very happy that we are taking part in the final. I hope we would do the same what we did before last year (Sadd beat Al Rayyan to win the title in 2017). We are here to win the title.

"We know the importance of this trophy in this country and we know how much importance the media, the citizens and residents give to this tournament. This final will be an illustrious place in the careers of the coaching staff, the

officials and medical staff as well. It will be an honour for us if we win the trophy," he said.

For Faria, who replaced Nabil Maaloul in January, this will be the biggest match of his career. The 43-year-old spent much of his career as assistant to Jose Mourinho, proving a valuable member to his fellow Portuguese's coaching staff at Europe's biggest clubs such as Chelsea, Manchester United, Real Madrid and Inter Milan. But having decided to go solo last year, it will be a test of Faria's credentials in a high-pressure match. Despite a slow start, Faria has been able to rally his team. While they could only finish second in the league, Duhail have entered the AFC Champions League knockout

stage and cruised past Al Sailiya in the Amir Cup semi-finals.

"We know the importance of the match. Al Sadd are an organised team with an experienced coach. But we are ready. We have paid a lot of attention to the details and we have trained well for the match and we hope it will end in a good way," Faria said yesterday.

"It will be an opportunity for me to win my first title which hopefully would be the first of many. It will mean a lot to win at a World Cup stadium. We have improved a lot recently and the team is getting stronger. We have faced strong teams and are ready to take on Sadd, who are a very good team," he said.

SPOTLIGHT

One of my best decisions to come to Qatar, says Xavi

The midfield great wants to end his playing career by winning the Amir Cup with Al Sadd today

Al Sadd captain Xavi Hernandez will be hoping for a perfect end to his illustrious footballing career today, when he leads his team out in the Amir Cup final against Al Duhail at the newly-built Al Wakrah Stadium.

While there will be a lot of attention towards the opening of the new World Cup venue, Xavi's focus will be on bidding farewell by winning another title with Al Sadd. Ahead of his retirement, Xavi spoke to club's official website, where he shared his experiences in Qatar over the past four years. Excerpts

Q: How do you rate your experience with Al Sadd during the past four years?

I rate my time here in Qatar very highly. It was one of the best decisions of my life to come here. My family and I, we are very comfortable here.

My children are like Qatari because they were born here. We are very happy and grateful to live here. Everyone offers us respect.

I want to thank my big family at Al Sadd, all my friends on the team, the management, the staff - everyone worked hard and they ensured that I was very happy throughout these last four years. Once again, I am happy to have come here and as I said, it is one of the best decisions of my life.

Q: What are your final goals before retiring?

We are delighted to reach the final of the Amir Cup. We will try to end the season in the best way possible by winning the title. It will be the ideal ending to the season, in the presence of His

A LOOK AT XAVI'S CAREER

Xavi lifted the 34th title of his career when Al Sadd won the QNB Stars League for the 14th time.

This was Xavi's fourth trophy with the Wolves, after having earlier won the Amir Cup, Qatar Cup and the Sheikh Jassim Cup.

The legendary midfielder joined Al Sadd in the summer of 2015, after achieving the treble with his childhood club FC Barcelona.

While at Barcelona, Xavi won the La Liga (8), Copa del Rey (3), UEFA Champions League (4), FIFA Club World Cup (2), Spanish Super Cup (6), and UEFA Super Cup (1).

In the colours of the Spanish national team, Xavi won the FIFA World Cup in 2010 and lifted the European Championship twice in 2008 and 2012. He also won the FIFA U-20 World Cup in 1999.

Highness the Amir and playing at the Al Wakrah Stadium, one of the venues of the World Cup. As the captain of the team, I hope I get the honour of lifting the trophy. This is one of the most important tournaments in Qatar and we want to grab this great opportunity.

We will play a Duhail team that has a number of good players. It will be a tough game, but we have trained hard during this past week and I am very excited for the opportunity to win the last

title of my life as a footballer at one of the 2022 World Cup pitches. We want to put smiles on the faces of our fans because they certainly deserve it.

Q: At the end of your career with Al Sadd, which is the title you wanted to win the most?

I won all the domestic titles here, the league, Amir Cup, Qatar Cup and the Sheikh Jassim Cup. I wanted to win the AFC Champions League. We had an excellent team and we were the better side in the semi-final against Persepolis but this is football. All the titles I won with Sadd are important but I hoped to win the Champions League title as well, and we were close to doing it.

Q: Who will be Xavi's successor in football?

I don't like comparisons in football. There are many excellent midfielders today, some of them are superstars, such as Busquets, Modric, Kroos and Verratti. Many others are there as well, but I don't really like comparisons and I don't want to miss out on any name. I think there will be better players than me, because football is like life, there is always renewal.

Q: What will your final message be and to whom?

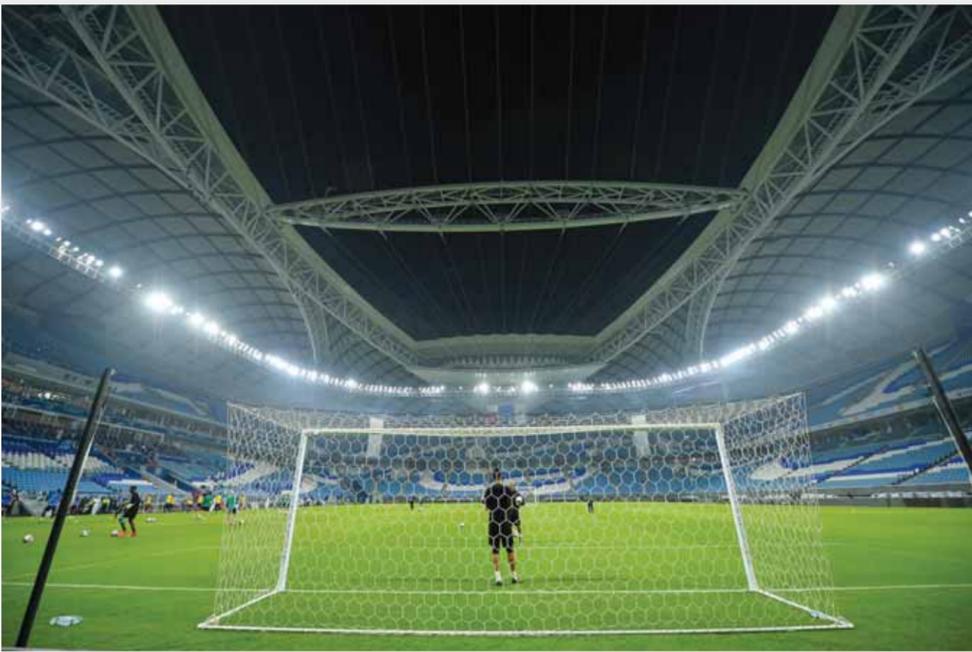
My final message is to say thanks to everyone. My time as a player was great, ever since I was a child. I did not expect to reach this level in my career. I played at Barcelona and Al Sadd, and I achieved all my dreams with them.

I want to thank Qatar, Al Sadd Club and everyone in Qatar. You will always be in my heart.



Xavi has won four Champions League titles and eight La Liga trophies for Barcelona, and a World Cup and two European Championships for Spain.

AL WAKRAH STADIUM SET FOR GRAND OPENING



Al Wakrah stadium, built for the 2022 World Cup, is decked up to host the Amir Cup final today. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil



Al Sadd captain Xavi Hernandez (left) warms up with his teammates at the Al Wakrah stadium yesterday.



Al Duhail star Almoez Ali trains with teammates at club's training ground. PICTURE: Anas al-Samarraee



FOCUS

Xavi is an inspiration for us, says teammate Gabi

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Sadd midfielder Gabi paid tribute to his captain and fellow Spaniard Xavi Hernandez, who will bring an end to his illustrious playing career today when they face Al Duhail in the Amir Cup final at the Al Wakrah stadium.

"Xavi is a role model and a dedicated player," said Gabi, who played against Xavi many times in La Liga, where the midfielder turned over for Barcelona. "He welcomes everyone and so we are going to miss him. I am happy to work with him. I speak a lot with Xavi and I am asking him to enjoy the final. Xavi is an inspiration and is of a world class standard. I hope we can win the title so that it will be a good farewell for this superstar," he added.

Al Sadd head coach Jesualdo Ferreira hoped the team can give Xavi a fitting farewell by winning the Amir Cup. The Portuguese manager also backed Xavi to be successful in coaching, which the Spaniard said he will do. "Tomorrow's game will also be a good farewell for me and Xavi. We want to win the title for him. Xavi will be a great manager," Ferreira said.



Al Sadd midfielder Gabi.

Meanwhile, Al Duhail coach Rui Faria called Xavi a 'complete midfielder'. "He is a very important player in the history of football. I had the chance to see him play when I was assistant coach of Real Madrid. He is no doubt a very complete midfielder player. Qatar will miss him. But I hope we will keep seeing home around in other capacities in football," Faria said.

Duhail captain Luiz Martin gushed as he called Xavi his role idol. "It's a big pleasure to play against Xavi. I have a lot respect for him. He is not just phenomenal player but also a very good person. For me it's been very difficult to play against him as he is the best midfielder. He is also my idol. He has given a lot for Al Sadd club," Martin said.

On the title clash, the Duhail skipper said they respect the opponents, but they will play to

win. "We are very happy to play in the final. Players love to play in such big matches. We have a lot of respect for the opponents and we will do everything to win the cup," said Martin.

"In the last game in the league, we were unlucky to concede an own goal in injury time. This game is always about important moments. We will focus and avoid making mistakes," he added.

Gabi, meanwhile, was excited to appear in his first Amir Cup final. "I am very motivated to play my first Amir Cup final in Qatar. Since the first day at Al Sadd, everyone spoke to me about the importance of the Amir Cup," the former Atletico Madrid midfielder said.

"We will play at one of the 2022 World Cup stadiums and this is a big motivation for us. This final is one for the history books. We played against Al Duhail twice in this season. The final will be tougher and fiercely contested. We want to make this season exceptional for Al Sadd, by winning the double and going forward in the AFC Champions league."

"Each of our players has a responsibility in this game, which will be a celebration for the country. We don't play a game like this every day. It will be a super game and we need to give our best," he said.



Al Duhail coach Rui Faria (right) and captain Luiz Martin during a press conference yesterday ahead of the Amir Cup final against Al Sadd. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil



SHOW ME THE MONEY!

Women's World Cup shines a spotlight on pay disparity

Women players earn a fraction of what their male counterparts earn



File photo of the then US President Barack Obama posing for a selfie taken by veteran star player Abby Wambach during an event at the White House honouring the United States women's national football team for their victory in the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup.

Reuters
Stockholm

The players set to light up the Women's World Cup in France next month may play for big-name clubs like Barcelona, Arsenal and Juventus but, although salaries are improving, they earn a fraction of the money paid to their male counterparts.

Nilla Fischer, who will move from Frauen-Bundesliga champions VfL Wolfsburg to FC Linköping in her native Sweden when the tournament is over, gave Reuters a stark assessment of the gap between men's and women's wages in a recent interview.

"What they maybe make in an hour, I make in a year," she said bluntly.

The vast pay inequality was one of the reasons that prompted Women's World Cup holders the United States to file a lawsuit against the US Soccer Federation in March.

All 28 members of the 2015 World Cup-winning squad were named as plaintiffs in federal court in Los Angeles in the lawsuit which outlined complaints about wages as well as other aspects of their working conditions when compared to the US men's side, who failed to

qualify for the 2018 World Cup.

The group that includes high-profile players such as Megan Rapinoe, Carli Lloyd and Alex Morgan said they have been consistently paid less money than their male counterparts even though their performance has been superior to the men's team.

"We believe that fighting for gender equality in sports is a part of that responsibility. As players, we deserved to be paid equally for our work, regardless of our gender," Morgan said at the time when the lawsuit was filed.

The advent of fully-professional leagues like the Women's Super League (WSL) in England is a step in the right direction, but there was still a long way to go, sports agent Lindi Ngwenya told Reuters.

"The definition of 'fully professional' is that the players are paid a salary that they can live on, so from this season all the players that you see in the WSL are on a basic (wage) of 20,000 to 25,000 pounds (\$25,904 to \$32,380) a year, plus accommodation, with the big clubs paying slightly more," she said.

In contrast, the average pay for a male footballer in England's Premier League was 3mn pounds a year, according to the 2018 Sporting Intelligence Global Sports

Salary Survey – or more than 100 times what their female counterparts are paid.

Despite that enormous gulf, improved salaries for women footballers in England represents a big step up from the most recent report published by player's union FIFPro in 2017.

The Global Football Employment Report contained the results of a survey of 3,600 top-level female players around the world and revealed an average wage of \$600 a month, with 50% of players saying they did not get paid for playing. Short-term contracts and a reliance on verbal, rather than written, agreements added to the insecurity for female players, according to the report.

Former rugby player and British army officer Ngwenya, director of London-based agency SISU Sports Management, said the structure of contracts varies from country to country.

French clubs are the top payers on straightforward professional contracts, while mid-tier German sides often offer a part-time employment contract with a local company on top of payments for playing.

Though high-profile internationals such as Norway's Ada Hegerberg and Brazil's Marta can earn six-figure sums and complement their salaries with lu-

crative endorsements, not all players are so lucky.

Ngwenya said bigger crowds and more media attention means more sponsorship and ultimately more money in players' pockets.

"We're seeing more money coming into the game, which clearly at the end of the day is going to be the driver," she said.

"The English FA subsidises the women's game a lot at the moment, but the hope and the plan is that commercial sponsors will come in to take up that slack and take the game forward."

For sponsors and the media it all comes down to return on investment, and the exposure provided by the Women's World Cup in France will provide a chance to gauge the current popularity and market value of women's football.

"The big tournaments are good, but we also want to get to a stage where the club game gets a commensurate amount of TV time and exposure," Ngwenya added.

Despite the enormous gap between the earnings of women and men, she was hopeful for the future.

"I can definitely see the progress – yes I would like it to be faster, but we are definitely making progress in the right direction," she said.

FOCUS

US to bank on firepower in search of fourth title

Reuters
New York

The United States are widely tipped to retain their crown at the Women's World Cup but to do so they will have to focus on their firepower and park the potentially distracting differences between the players and their football association.

The decision by the squad to file a lawsuit in a California court alleging "institutionalized gender discrimination" under the Equal Pay Act earlier this year has cast a shadow over their preparations, but the American women know their value in what is expected to be the biggest Women's World Cup to date.

Having won three of the previous seven tournaments and four Olympic gold medals, the US women are ranked number one in the world, and bookmakers have them neck-and-neck with hosts France as favourites to win the 2019 tournament.

With players such as striker Alex Morgan and midfielders Carli Lloyd and Julie Ertz, they have both the attacking power and the physicality to go all the way again.

They cruised through the 2018 CONCACAF Championship which serves as the qualifying campaign for the World Cup, winning the tournament on home soil without conceding a goal.

The opposition then was not as

strong as what awaits in France, but Morgan, Lloyd and Megan Rapinoe showed the full potency of the American attack as the team scored 26 goals in their five tournament games.

The world champions will have plenty of time to find their feet in France, opening their Group F campaign against Thailand on June 11 before taking on World Cup debutants Chile five days later – neither of which should stretch them but gives their forwards the chance to find their range. They round off with a stiffer-looking test against Sweden on June 20 which is likely to decide the top two positions in the group.

British-born coach Jill Ellis has raised a few eyebrows with some of the names in her squad, selecting the likes of Ali Krieger, who only recently returned to the national team, and Allie Long and Morgan Brian, who have both been hampered by injuries.

"These 23 players have been through adversity and success, and it's a group that has the talent, confidence, experience and desire to help us win the World Cup," Ellis said as she announced her squad.

Though the 52-year-old coach does not have a huge array of specialist options at full back, she has plenty of versatile players who can cover, and her embarrassment of attacking riches mean that it is unlikely to be an issue as the Americans go in search of their fourth world title.



July 10, 2015 file photo of US women's soccer player Megan Rapinoe (C) holding the World Cup trophy as she rides a float with teammate Carli Lloyd (L), New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio (back L) and Coach Jill Ellis (R) during a ticker tape parade in lower Manhattan to celebrate their World Cup final win over Japan.

Captain Kerr looks to get the Matildas waltzing

Sydney: There is a good case for ranking Sam Kerr as Australia's best footballer, female or male, at the moment and the country's hopes of a first World Cup triumph in France in July rest in no small part upon the prolific striker's shoulders.

No Australian player has come close to enjoying the 25-year-old's profile – with her 130,000 social media followers, Nike endorsement and other commercial deals – since Socceroos forward Tim Cahill hung up his boots. Great careers are not built on profile alone, however, and at her third World Cup, Kerr has a chance to truly cement her place among the game's best.

Goals are the gold standard by which strikers are judged and Kerr, who made her debut for Australia as a 15-year-old in 2009, has been banging them in from all over the park.

The second time she found the net for her country was against North Korea in the 2010 Asian Cup final, a cool finish for Australia's only goal of the game as the Matildas won their first major trophy on penalties.

She has scored 30 more for Australia since and is as prolific in club football, winning the golden boot in both Australia's W-League and the National Women's Soccer League in the United States for the last two seasons.

Blessed with blistering pace and devastating in front of goal with both her head and her almost unerring accuracy right foot, the 2017 Asian Player of the Year will test any defence.

In another sign of her burgeoning reputation, Kerr was named Australia's captain earlier this year, with coach Ante Milicic confident she has the leadership skills to succeed. "She's very respected in the world game and I think we have to be proud... and really embrace that, because she's still got a lot of good football in front of her," Milicic said. "I've been to two World Cups with the men's team as well. I've worked with some fantastic leaders... I see a lot of those leadership qualities in Sammy."

Kerr's Kolkata-born father Roger and brother Daniel played Australian Rules professionally and while the indigenous football code was her first love, it was soccer that offered her a chance to pursue her own career in sport. Her hard work and intense focus belie her joy at being able to play the game for a living – evident in her trademark goal celebration of a cartwheel and backflip.

"I always just try to have fun, whatever I'm doing, and that's something I do on the field too," she said earlier this year. "It's an honour to be at a World Cup – and it's a moment I've lived for my whole life." – Reuters

BOTTOMLINE

FIFA seeks a billion World Cup viewers to boost women's game

Reuters
Stockholm

FIFA is hoping that over a billion viewers tune in to the Women's World Cup in France as it continues strategic efforts to grow the game around the globe, but the governing body is still subject to criticism over gender equality.

The fact that hundreds of thousands of tickets have been sold indicates a strong interest in the women's game, but there is an even stronger desire among fans and players for rapid change that FIFA is struggling to contend with.

The 2019 World Cup represents a chance for the governing body to show the world it is taking women seriously. Long criticised for its lax attitude to

women in the game, FIFA established a Women's Football Division in 2016 and is pursuing a three-pronged strategy to promote women's football and close the gap to the men.

"We are looking forward to building on the number of viewers that will tune into the FIFA Women's World Cup. In 2015, 750mn people tuned in and this summer we want to bring that figure up to 1bn," a FIFA spokesperson said.

FIFA hopes the additional exposure attracts new fans to a sport that is still mostly amateur, with only a handful of top players earning a living wage.

Launched in October 2018, FIFA's strategy focuses on three pillars – growing the game, enhancing commercial value and strengthening the foundations of women's soccer.

"The women's game is a top priority for FIFA," Secretary-General Fatma

Samoura said at the launch.

The thorny issue of prize money for the Women's World Cup has been addressed, but proved to be something of a minefield.

The pot has been doubled to \$30mn and associations and clubs will also benefit from extra cash, but critics say the financial gap between the women's and men's events is still far too wide.

The prize fund for the men's World Cup in Russia last year was about 400mn euros (\$448mn), with champions France said to have received 38mn euros – more than the total prize money for the women's tournament this year.

The news prompted world players' union FIFPro to release a statement saying "football remains even further from the goal of equality for all World Cup players regardless of gender."

FIFA president Gianni Infantino accepted the criticism, saying the "critical comments are perfectly justified because the unions and the players, they defend their own interests, which is a fair point." The governing body is set to provide a platform for robust discussion with its first-ever Global Football Convention, which will take place on June 6 and 7 in Paris before the tournament gets underway.

"It will bring leaders from sport and politics together to discuss furthering diversity and equality, both on and off the pitch," Samoura said.

The key challenge for FIFA will be to rapidly close the gender equality gap while growing the game in a sustainable way, and a successful World Cup in France will go a long way to building the internal and external support necessary to do so.

FEATURE

Tough Bronze brings Lyon experience to Lionesses

'I WANTED TO BE THE BEST AT IT AND I HAD TO PUT ALL THE THINGS ASIDE AND GO FOR IT'

Reuters
Lyon, France

When Lucy Bronze kicked off her professional career at Everton, her earnings were all-but wiped out by the cost of being a footballer.

Bronze did not care about the money, though. She just wanted to play football.

It was a focus that paid off, and next month the Olympique Lyonnais defender will be central to England's assault on the women's World Cup in France.

A self-described aggressive and hardworking defender, the 27-year-old says she is now enjoying the "house and the car" in Lyon, where she hopes the Lionesses will play the semi-finals and the final of the sport's top event.

And Bronze trusts that the experience she has accumulated since joining Europe's most successful club in 2017 will prove an asset for England who finished third in the 2015 World Cup.

"When I first signed a contract with a women's team, my contract stated that if I played I would get 100 pounds and if I didn't play it would be zero," Bronze told Reuters in an interview.

"If you got injured you got zero, it was crazy." But Bronze wanted just one thing after years of practice on the streets with her brother, and growing up with parents who did not watch football, let alone play it.

"My mum and dad don't like football, they didn't watch it at all. Obviously they watch it now, they watch me, but my dad can't play football, he's terrible and my mum's the same," she recalled.

"My brother is two years older than me and he just used to play football on the street with his friends after school. And everything my brother did, I wanted to do the same... I wanted to be him."

In due course, Bronze got a degree in



Defender of England's football team Lucy Bronze (C) attends a training session ahead of the FIFA Women's World Cup, at the Groupama Olympique Lyon training centre in Decines-Charpieu near Lyon, France. (File photo)

sports science and said she was soon facing a choice.

"It was at that moment when I thought 'do I want to get a job now and keep playing football or am I just gonna play football?'"

"I didn't get paid enough money really to live properly, sleeping on people's sofas and stuff, but that was the moment when I thought I just wanna play football professionally whether I get paid 10 euros

or 10,000 euros, I just wanna play."

And she played, moving up the ranks from Everton to Lyon to make it to the short list of the first women's Ballon d'Or, via stints at Liverpool and Manchester City.

"I think it was only five years ago now when I kind of took that jump and left my education to the side and left all those other things to focus on football," said Bronze.

"I wanted to be the best at it and I

had to put all the things aside and go for it, and if I wasn't gonna make any money, I wasn't gonna make any money."

"I didn't think I was gonna be in the position I am in today with a house and car and living a nice life, but back then it didn't matter and it still doesn't matter."

Sexist remarks didn't matter either to a player who says she would 'run through a brick wall to win a game'.

"I never had a problem with the people I was close to because I was playing football with them and they knew I could play, it didn't matter that I was a girl," she explained.

"It's more people from the outside, fans, people you don't know who question it. I remember teachers at school thinking 'she thinks she can play football, but she's a girl!' But it didn't bother me."

"When you're a woman in any job you get 'she can't do that because she's a woman' but to me it kind of makes me laugh – if you think I can't do it I'll show you that I can do it and then you're the one who's gonna look stupid for having those stupid opinions."

Bronze, playing in a team who won a record five Champions Leagues, is an asset her England coach Phil Neville is well aware of.

"He asks me a lot of stuff about what I do in Lyon or what the club does," she said.

What Bronze will do when her professional career ends is anyone's guess.

"I wanna play until I am 45 if my body will let me," she said with a smile. "After football I have no idea."

"I would love to go back (to school), maybe do more education, sometimes I think I wanna be a coach, then I think I'd like to be a fitness coach or in a boardroom in women's football to make it better, and then sometimes I think I'm just gonna buy a bar in Barcelona."

APPOINTMENT

Croatia's Stimac named India coach



AFP
New Delhi

Former Croatia coach Igor Stimac was named India manager yesterday, replacing Englishman Stephen Constantine who quit following the Asian Cup exit.

"Igor is the right candidate to coach the Blue Tigers... Indian football is going through a transition, and I am confident his vast experience will guide us to higher echelons," All India Football Federation president Praful Patel said in a statement.

A former centre-back who won 53 caps, Stimac was in charge of Croatia during qualification for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

He was sacked after Croatia took only one point from their last four group games meaning they only just scraped into a playoff. Niko Kovac was in caretaker charge as they overcame Iceland to reach the finals.

Stimac's last job was with Al-Shahania club in Qatar.

Constantine stepped down as India coach in January after an injury-time Bahrain penalty denied the cricket-mad nation a historic place in the Asian Cup knockout stages in a 1-0 defeat.

SPOTLIGHT

Former Wales manager Coleman fired by Hebei

AFP
Shanghai

Former Wales manager Chris Coleman was sacked as coach of struggling Hebei China Fortune yesterday after the club's fans demanded his removal.

The 48-year-old's side have won only once in nine Chinese Super League (CSL) games this season and languish one place off the bottom of the table.

A Hebei team containing former Barcelona star Javier Mascherano lost 3-2 at home to mid-table Henan Jianye at the weekend and had a player sent off for the fourth time in all competitions this year.

Angry fans held aloft a banner during Saturday's defeat that said in English: "Hello Mr Coleman, please go home! You're fired!!!"

Above that in Chinese it read: "Coleman, your mum wants you home for dinner."

Coleman, who took Sunderland down into England's third tier in his previous job, was appointed as a replacement for West Ham United-bound Manuel Pellegrini in June last year.

But despite guiding Hebei away from the relegation zone last year, he won only seven



of his 28 games in total.

"After friendly negotiation and agreement reached between the two parties, with immediate effect, Mr Chris Coleman will no longer serve as head coach of Hebei China Fortune Football Club," the club said in a statement on the Twitter-like Weibo.

"We sincerely thank Coleman for his hard work and contribution to the team and wish him all the best in his future work and life."

Coleman's wife Charlotte, a television

presenter, defended his record and said in a tweet that was later deleted: "We hoped to leave before the season started but were not allowed to, after losing players and not being allowed to sign any replacements."

Coleman was a defender for Crystal Palace, Swansea City, Blackburn Rovers and Fulham during his playing days, and later became the manager of then-Premier League side Fulham.

He spent four years in the hot seat at Craven Cottage and then had a spell with Real Sociedad in Spain.

But he enjoyed his most successful time in charge of his native Wales, taking them to a shock semi-final place at Euro 2016.

His sacking at Hebei comes as little surprise.

After a 2-0 defeat to Marouane Fellaini's Shandong Luneng earlier this month, Hebei issued an open letter to fans apologising and saying that it has been "the toughest start (to a season) in the club's history".

"We let you down and we can't make any excuses for the recent performances," said a statement.

"We have to say to you: sorry!"

Hebei, who are above rock-bottom Beijing Renhe only on goal difference in the CSL, travel to seventh-placed Tianjin Teda on Sunday.

BOTTOMLINE

German league rejects proposal to create closed Champions League

Reuters
Berlin

The German Football League (DFL) has rejected a proposal to create a near-closed Champions League from 2024 onwards, adding to widespread opposition to the plan.

The DFL, which runs the top two divisions of the Football League system – known as the Bundesliga and Bundesliga 2 – said in a statement that such a competition would have "unacceptable conse-

quences" for national leagues around Europe.

The region's governing body UEFA is working with the European Club Association (ECA), whose members include all of the continent's biggest clubs, to re-design European competition after the current international calendar ends in 2024.

UEFA has said discussions are at a preliminary stage and has not given any further details. But according to reports of a meeting held between UEFA and representatives of the European Leagues last week, the governing body has already put a

proposal on the table which would involve drastic changes. Several league representatives who were present have said that the proposal included a three-tier European league with promotion and relegation between each division.

The top tier – the equivalent of the Champions League – would include 32 teams, the top 24 of whom would keep their places for the next season, ending the tradition that qualifying for European competition is achieved via national leagues.

Only four places would be open to the winners of Europe's 54 national leagues.

FOCUS

Argentina's Aguero set to return for Copa America – sources

Reuters
Buenos Aires

Manchester City striker Sergio Aguero will be part of Argentina's provisional squad for the Copa America, two sources from the country's soccer body told Reuters yesterday.

Aguero, who scored 21 Premier League goals in 33 appearances for Manchester City this season, has been in international exile since after last year's World Cup in Russia, when Argentina crashed out in the last 16. The Argentine Football Association (AFA) will announce a squad of up to 40 players, before submitting their final 23-man selection for the tournament two weeks later.

"Kun (Aguero) will be in the call-up," said one source with the Argentine national team who asked not to be named.

A second source at the AFA confirmed the return of the striker, saying that his goalscor-

ing statistics spoke for themselves. "Because of that he has been called up again," the source said.

Aguero spearheaded Man City's Premier League charge and was on the scoresheet on Sunday when they wrapped up a second straight title with a 4-1 victory over Brighton and Hove Albion. Alongside Aguero, Barcelona great Lionel Messi and Paris St Germain's Angel Di Maria will also be in the squad.

The Copa America, which will be held in Brazil between June 14 and July 7, will feature the 10 South American teams, as well as Qatar and Japan as guests.

Argentina, who have been coached by Lionel Scaloni since the departure of Jorge Sampaoli last year, will play in Group B alongside Colombia, Paraguay and Qatar.

Guardiola beats Klopp to manager of the year award

London: Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola edged out Jurgen Klopp to a trophy for the second time in three days as the Catalan claimed the League Managers' Association manager of the year on Tuesday. Guardiola's City retained the Premier League title on Sunday, beating Klopp's Liverpool by a single point at the end of a thrilling title race. Having also won the League Cup earlier in the campaign,

Guardiola's side could complete a first ever domestic treble in English football when they face Watford in the FA Cup final at Wembley on Saturday. Guardiola topped the vote ahead of Jurgen Klopp, Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino, who has led Spurs to their first ever Champions League final, and Nuno Espirito Santo of Wolves, who finished seventh in their first season back in the top flight.

NBA

Curry powers Warriors over Trail Blazers in series opener

The schedule favoured us. I thought we took advantage of the situation and got off to a good start



Seth Curry of the Portland Trail Blazers defends Stephen Curry (left) of the Golden State Warriors during the first-half in game one of the NBA Western Conference Finals at ORACLE Arena in Oakland, California. (Getty Images/AFP)

AFP
Los Angeles

Stephen Curry drained nine three-pointers on the way to 36 points on Tuesday to propel the Golden State Warriors to a 116-94 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers in game one of the NBA Western Conference finals.

Curry added seven assists and six rebounds as the Warriors led all the way over a Trail Blazers team coming off a game-seven victory over Denver in the second round on Sunday. Klay Thompson added 26 points and provided an imposing defensive presence as the Warriors shrugged off the absence of injured superstar Kevin Durant. Draymond Green added 12

points, 10 rebounds, five assists, two steals and three blocked shots for the two-time defending NBA champions, who are playing in their fifth straight Western Conference final. Curry said he just took advantage of what a free-flowing Warriors offense gave him.

"It was a nice flow," Curry said. "It just puts so much pressure on the defense. You can't key it on one guy and even if you try to somebody else is going to be open."

The Trail Blazers connected on only 36.1 percent of their shots from the floor, making just seven of 28 three-point attempts as the Warriors drained 17 from beyond the arc. Portland star Damian Lillard hit just four of 12 shots to score 19 points with six assists, four rebounds and seven turnovers. CJ McCollum, who starred as Lillard

struggled in game seven against the Nuggets, scored 17 points on seven-of-19 shooting. "The schedule favoured us," acknowledged Golden State coach Steve Kerr, whose Warriors polished off the Houston Rockets on Friday. "I thought we took advantage of the situation and got off to a good start."

The Warriors pushed their lead to 10 in the second quarter before Portland put together a run that trimmed the deficit to 48-45.

Curry answered with a pair of late three-pointers - abetted by a Lillard turnover - to send the Warriors to the locker-room leading 54-45. The Trail Blazers made another push in the third period, cutting a 17-point deficit to six. Rodney Hood and Seth Curry both had three-pointers in the Blazers' 11-4 scoring run to end the quarter, but

those were the only points of the night for the younger Curry brother - a Portland reserve - as the game marked the first time siblings have met in an NBA conference final.

The Warriors reserves opened strong in the fourth quarter to re-build the cushion in a stretch that Kerr called key.

"Great job by our bench," Kerr said. "If we can buy some time for our starters to rest and even extend the lead, that's a huge deal for us."

Despite their shooting woes, the Trail Blazers managed to stay in touch much of the night thanks to making 27 of 31 free throws and out-rebounding the Warriors 47-42. But their 21 turnovers led to 31 Warriors points - a gift no team can afford to give Golden State.

"You can't allow that," said Lillard, who admitted it was hard to

come back from the emotional high of beating the Nuggets in Denver.

"I thought our minds were right. We came into the game ready," he said. "But they're a team that can go on runs, they make shots and the game can get away."

In particular, Lillard said, the Blazers need to make things more difficult for Curry, who had open look after open look.

"That was poor execution defensively on our part," Lillard said. "Having our bigs back that far, we've got to bring our guys up and run them off the line."

The Warriors will try to double their advantage in the best-of-seven series when they host game two today. They are again expected to be without two-time NBA Finals MVP Durant, who has a right calf strain.

FOCUS

Pelicans will pick first in NBA draft

AFP
Chicago

The New Orleans Pelicans won the NBA draft lottery on Tuesday and will have the chance to make collegiate superstar Zion Williamson the top pick on June 20.

The New York Knicks, Cleveland Cavaliers and Phoenix Suns each had a 14 percent chance of landing the number one selection under a system that gives equal chance of winning the lottery to the teams with the three worst records in the league.

The Pelicans were a long shot, with only a 6 percent chance of winning the lottery.

But they came up number one, with the second pick in the June 20 draft going to the Memphis Grizzlies. The New York Knicks gained the third selection and the Los Angeles Lakers will pick fourth.

Duke University star Williamson was an interested onlooker at the ceremony in Chicago, since he's widely predicted to be taken first in the draft after a dazzling freshman season.

Williamson averaged 22.6 points and 8.9 rebounds per game for the Blue Devils, who were knocked out of the March Madness NCAA tournament in the Elite Eight round.

"It's a lot to take in. I don't know where I'm going to be," he said, noting that until draft day comes it's not certain the Pelicans will pick him.

Wherever he lands, Williamson said, he believes his "will to win" will be the biggest asset he can bring to the NBA.

"Whatever that team needs me to do, I'm going to be able to do it," he said.

The outcome of the lottery immediately sparked speculation that a Pelicans team that adds Williamson could induce disgruntled star Anthony Davis to stay.

Davis was at the centre of one of this season's most acrimonious NBA soap operas after submitting a trade request in January with the Lakers believed to be his preferred destination.

The move stalled after negotiations between the clubs collapsed.

Davis has a year remaining on his Pelicans contract, and acknowledged last month that he could yet end up in New Orleans next season.

"Obviously it's a possibility it could happen," he said, and the addition of Williamson to the roster might make that prospect more inviting. The Cleveland Cavaliers will pick fifth in the draft, Phoenix sixth, Chicago seventh and Atlanta eighth. Washington and Atlanta round out the top 10.

Dodgers' Urias placed on leave after domestic violence arrest

Major League Baseball placed Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Julio Urias on administrative leave on Tuesday after he was arrested on suspicion of misdemeanor domestic battery on Monday night. The Los Angeles Police Department said an incident involving the 22-year-old Urias and a woman took place around 7:30 p.m. PT in the parking lot of the Beverly Center, a local shopping centre. Following a night in jail, Urias was released at 1:30 a.m. PT after posting \$20,000 bail.

MLB said it is investigating the matter and is "in the process of gathering facts" while Urias is on administrative leave, which can be extended multiple times past the seven-day limit.

"We learned about the alleged incident this morning and are in the process of gathering information," the Dodgers said in a statement Tuesday. "As a result, we have no comment at this time regarding the incident. However, every allegation of domestic violence must be taken seriously and addressed promptly, and we will cooperate fully with the authorities and Major League Baseball to ensure that that happens in this case."

To fill the roster spot, the Dodgers on Tuesday recalled right-handed pitcher JT Chargois from Triple-A Oklahoma City. During his first stint with the Dodgers from April 9-11, the 28-year-old Chargois pitched 1 2/3 innings over two games, allowing two runs and striking out one. Urias started the season in the rotation for the Dodgers but was moved to the bullpen. In nine games (four starts), he is 2-2 with two saves and a 3.18 ERA.

MLB

Rockies outlast Red Sox in 11 innings despite 24 strikeouts

Reuters
Los Angeles

Mark Reynolds hit a tiebreaking RBI single in the top of the 11th inning as the Colorado Rockies overcame a near-historic number of strikeouts to beat the host Boston Red Sox 5-4 on Tuesday.

The Rockies had fanned 24 times without a walk before Ryan McMahon and Nolan Arenado reached on ball four from Ryan Brasier (2-2) in the 11th. Reynolds' game-winning single came on an 0-2 count with two outs.

Colorado narrowly avoided the major league record of 26 collective strikeouts in a game.

Red Sox ace Chris Sale was responsible for a career-high 17 of them, becoming the first pitcher in major league history to reach that total in seven or fewer innings.

Mike Dunn (1-0) finished the bottom of the 10th for the win, and Wade Davis worked around a two-out single for his seventh save.

The 24 strikeouts by Boston pitching tied a franchise record.

The Red Sox had a five-game winning streak snapped, losing for just the third time in their last 14 contests.

After Sale exited with a 3-2 lead after seven, the Rockies went ahead in the eighth on a two-run home run by Charlie Blackmon.

RESULTS

Rockies	5-4	Red Sox
Blue Jays	7-3	Giants
Cubs	3-1	Reds
Dodgers	6-3	Padres
Twins	4-3	Angels
Pirates	6-2	D'backs
Brewers	6-1	Phillies
Indians	9-0	White Sox
Mets	6-2	Nationals
Rays	4-0	Marlins
Astros	11-4	Tigers
Mariners	4-3	Athletics
Cardinals	14-3	Braves
Royals	11-5	Rangers

Boston knotted the score in the bottom of the frame on a pinch-hit RBI single by Mitch Moreland, helping send the game to extra innings.

Sale, who fanned 14 his last time out in Baltimore, picked up where he left off. He struck out the first six Rockies he faced and eight his first time through the lineup.

Sale whiffed the last two men in the fifth and made it five straight by getting the side in order in the sixth.

An Arenado homer after a Trevor Story leadoff single in the seventh made it 3-2, and

Sale responded by striking out the next three batters on 12 pitches.

Sale allowed two runs on three hits with no walks.

Boston manager Alex Cora decided 108 pitches was enough for Sale.

"He made a lot of pitches the last one, so you got to be careful," Cora said.

"There's a bigger goal here. We've been very disciplined ... and you still have to be disciplined. I think he understands."

Sale said, "You got 17 punchouts, you definitely want to go out for the last inning. But I respect (Cora) as much as anybody on the planet, and I'll never question anything he does, even in regard to me with that."

Brandon Workman, who hadn't given up a hit in his last 11 appearances, then took over and gave up Blackmon's go-ahead blast after a Chris Iannetta double.

An Arenado error put the tying run on to begin the Boston eighth, and Moreland came through with runners on first and second and one out.

Michael Chavis got the Red Sox on the board in the second with a towering home run just fair over the Green Monster in left, and J.D. Martinez and Rafael Devers added solo shots in the third.

Rockies starter Kyle Freeland allowed three runs on the three homers and five hits total over six innings. He walked three and struck out seven.



Colorado Rockies first baseman Mark Reynolds hits an RBI single during the eleventh inning against the Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

CYCLING

Ackermann sprints to second Giro stage win in heavy rain

'All the stage was scary, all the descents, you cannot see that much in the peloton because of all the water. It just was lucky that nobody crashed'



Team Bora rider Germany's Pascal Ackermann (right) celebrates as he finishes first ahead of Colombia's Fernando Gaviria in stage five of the 102nd Giro d'Italia yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Frascati, Italy

German champion Pascal Ackermann took his second stage win of the Giro d'Italia in a sprint finish through torrential rain yesterday while injured former race winner Tom Dumoulin pulled out.

Slovenian Primož Roglič kept the overall leader's pink jersey after the fifth stage from Frascati to Terracina was neutralised with nine km remaining for safety reasons due to the treacherous conditions. That allowed the sprinters to race for the line while the main men stayed safe in the pack and out of the way.

Roglič (Team Jumbo-Visma) leads Britain's Simon Yates by an unchanged 35-second margin. The Slovenian was seen talking to the race director about the

conditions with 70km to go. Colombian Fernando Gaviria, for UAE Team Emirates, finished the stage second behind the Bora-Hansgrohe rider with Frenchman Arnaud Demare third for Groupama-FDJ in a stage that was also neutralised for the first 2.7km.

Ackermann, making his grand tour debut, also won Sunday's second stage from Bologna to Fucecchio.

"All the stage was scary, all the descents, you cannot see that much in the peloton because of all the water," said Ackermann, wearing the cyclamen jersey for the sprinter classification leader.

"It just was lucky that nobody crashed."

The German said it had been effectively a double sprint to the finish for him after he had to brake in the last 250 metres before harnessing all the power in his legs in a final dash for the line

to take Gaviria by half a wheel. The sprint finish, in the seaside resort south of Rome, was all the more impressive for the pools of standing water on the asphalt.

Dumoulin, feeling the effects of a big crash on Tuesday, had started the stage but the Dutchman abandoned shortly after the start with his focus now on the Tour de France.

"I wanted to finish it. I am not ready to go home yet," the 2017 champion told *Eurosport*.

"I didn't want to be at home in two days' time and my knee would be less swollen and I would be able to do a ride and feeling sad that I didn't try and maybe if I'd pushed through and with some painkillers today it could have been possible.

"I would have always asked myself that question and now I ask myself and know the answer."

Belgian rider Louis Vervake

was caught 23km from the finish after staging a long breakaway.

Thursday's sixth stage is 238km from Cassino to San Giovanni Rotondo, with a fast opening 190km and no major climbs before ascending through hairpins.

RESULTS FIFTH STAGE

1. Pascal Ackermann (GER/BOR) 3hr 15min 44sec. 2. Fernando Gaviria (COL/UAE) s.t., 3. Arnaud Demare (FRA/FDJ) s.t., 4. Caleb Ewan (AUS/LOT) s.t., 5. Matteo Moschetti (ITA/TRE) s.t., 6. Ryan Gibbons (RSA/DDT) s.t., 7. Paolo Simion (ITA/BAR) s.t., 8. Yenthe Biersmans (BEL/KAT) s.t., 9. Giovanni Lonardi (ITA/NIP) s.t., 10. Manuel Belletti (ITA/AND) s.t.

Selected: 38. Bob Jungels (LUX/DEC) s.t., 39. Mikel Landa (ESP/MOV) s.t., 49. Vincenzo Nibali (ITA/BAH) s.t., 61. Primož Roglič (SLO/JUM)

s.t., 73. Miguel Angel Lopez (COL/AST) s.t., 75. Simon Yates (GBR/MIT) s.t., 76. Tao Geoghegan Hart (GBR/INE) s.t.

Retired: Tom Dumoulin (NED/SUN), Jelle Vanendert (BEL/LOT)

Did not start: Kristijan Koren (SLO/BAH).

OVERALL STANDINGS

1. Primož Roglič (SLO/JUM) 19hr 35min 04sec. 2. Simon Yates (GBR/MIT) 35. 3. Vincenzo Nibali (ITA/BAH) 39. 4. Miguel Angel Lopez (COL/AST) 44. 5. Diego Ulissi (ITA/UAE) 44. 6. Rafal Majka (POL/BOR) 49. 7. Bauke Mollema (NED/TRE) 55. 8. Damiano Caruso (ITA/BAH) 56. 9. Bob Jungels (LUX/DEC) 1:02. 10. Davide Formolo (ITA/BOR) 1:06

SELECTED

19. Pascal Ackermann (GER/BOR) 1:37. 22. Mikel Landa (ESP/MOV) 1:49. 31. Caleb Ewan (AUS/LOT) 2:26

RUGBY

Carter laughs off suggestions of World Cup comeback

Reuters
Wellington

Two-times World Cup winner Dan Carter has laughed off suggestions he could make a surprise return to the All Blacks squad for this year's tournament as New Zealand grapples with concerns over their depth at flyhalf.

The 37-year-old has not played for the All Blacks since the 2015 final and is not contracted to New Zealand Rugby, but a season-ending injury to Damian McKenzie has seen concerns mount about who will be the third flyhalf heading to Japan.

Carter was mentioned by his former All Blacks coach Graham Henry as a possibility, but the three-times World Player of the Year said a recent neck surgery would rule him out anyway.

"I was having a laugh at that when I heard my name being thrown around," Carter told Fairfax Media on Wednesday after receiving the New Zealand Order of Merit in Auckland.

"I think I can start contact training again in October. So I might be right for the semi-final or final... the first tackle in a big game like that would be quite entertaining.

"My focus is on recovering from this with the hope of finishing off my contract in Japan."

Carter had neck surgery in early April after a previously

undiagnosed injury ended his hopes of a lucrative short-term return to French club Racing 92.

He is currently contracted to Japanese club Kobelco Steelers and is expected to return for the Top League season when it begins after the World Cup, which would also make him ineligible for the All Blacks, who only select New Zealand-based players.

Carter, however, said it was not a risk to go into the tournament with two specialist flyhalves – most likely Beauden Barrett and Richie Mo'unga – and rely on other utility players to slot in if needed.

"You just have to focus on the resources and the talent that you do have," he said.

"The coaches and selectors have been around for a while, they will be working on things behind the scenes as well to give them some security in case there are more injuries."

All Blacks supporters had a similar crisis of confidence during the 2011 World Cup when Carter and Colin Slade went down injured and Aaron Cruden and Stephen Donald were called in.

Donald, who had been fishing when he got the phone call from Henry to join the squad, then entered folklore as he kicked a penalty to give the All Blacks an 8-7 victory over France in the final.

"We have been in that situation before and still won a World Cup," Carter said. "And that gives us a lot of confidence."

Cyclists suspended as police probe Austrian blood doping ring

Professional cyclists Kristijan Koren of Slovenia and Croatian Kristijan Durasek have been suspended as police investigate an Austrian blood doping ring, Cycling's world governing body the UCI said yesterday.

Two other retired riders, Italian Alessandro Petacchi and Slovenian Borut Bozic, have also been implicated in the Operation Aderlass investigation. Koren, 32, who rides for the Bahrain team of Italian star Vincenzo Nibali, has been competing in the Giro d'Italia, which started this week and was 47th overall after Tuesday's fourth stage.

UAE Emirates' Durasek was riding in the Tour of California.

According to Italian sports daily *Gazzetta dello Sport*, who organises the three-week Giro, sources "close to the dossier" claim that Koren and Bozic's implication dates back to 2012-2013. Koren was riding for the Cannondale team at the time, while Bozic, whose 21 wins include a stage of the 2009 Tour of Spain, rode for Astana. Durasek, 31, who won the Tour of Turkey in 2015, is alleged to have more recent

links. Petacchi, who won 48 Grand Tour stages including 22 on the Giro before retiring in 2015, has been cited by the UCI for a potential "use of prohibited methods".

The 45-year-old has also been temporarily dropped from his role as a television pundit on this year's Giro with Italian public broadcaster RAI.

"For us, nothing changes," said Raisport director Auro Bulbarelli.

"But, faced with these accusations, it is right that Alessandro has the opportunity to assess the situation with his lawyer. "We believe it is appropriate to take a few days off to clarify all the details of this story."

Bozic retired last year and joined the Bahrain team management, but was not present on the Giro.

The Bahrain team, which has suspended Koren and Bozic, stressed that "the two cases concern the seasons of 2012 and/or 2013".

"The team is still conducting extensive medical checks (including a biological passport check) of any new riders signed," the team added.

NHL

Bruins on brink of Stanley Cup final after win over 'Canes

AFP
Los Angeles

The Boston Bruins are one win away from a Stanley Cup finals berth after a 2-1 victory over the Carolina Hurricanes on Tuesday in the NHL Eastern Conference final.

Tuukka Rask made 35 saves for the Bruins, who followed up two home wins with a victory in Raleigh, North Carolina, to take a 3-0 stranglehold on the best-of-seven series. Chris Wagner and Brad Marchand scored for the Bruins, who will try to complete a four-game sweep in Raleigh tomorrow.

"(Rask) is always calm and collected," Boston centre Patrice Bergeron said. "Right now, he's in the zone. He's been amazing. He's a huge reason why we're here right now."

Calvin de Haan scored and Curtis McElhinney made 29 saves for the Hurricanes, who lost at home for the first time in these playoffs after five wins on home ice. McElhinney, who won the final three games in Caro-

lina's second-round sweep of the New York Islanders, started for the Hurricanes after they were outscored 11-4 in the first two games of the series with Petr Mrazek in front of the net.

"We came out exactly how we wanted to, but it didn't work out," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I'm proud of the way we played that game."

After Rask made 20 saves in the first period, the Bruins took advantage of a Hurricanes turnover to take a 1-0 lead 1:21 into the second.

Brock McGinn's clearing pass hit Boston forward Sean Kuraly in the skates, and Joakim Nordstrom fed Wagner for a redirection. Marchand gave Boston a 2-0 lead with a power-play goal at 6:28.

De Haan cut the lead to 2-1 with slap shot from the left face-off circle that beat Rask at 13:48.

The goal was de Haan's first in 27 NHL playoff games, but the Hurricanes couldn't build on it. Carolina were 0-for-5 on the power play, including four opportunities in the first period.

"Our power play wasn't,

again, good enough - 5-on-3, 4-on-3," captain Justin Williams said. "We didn't get enough on it."

SABRES NAME KRUEGER FIFTH HEAD COACH SINCE 2013

Named Buffalo's fifth head coach since 2013 yesterday, Ralph Krueger takes on the task of ending the Sabres' eight-year Stanley Cup playoff drought. General manager Jason Botterill believes the 59-year-old former Edmonton Oilers coach and English Premier League executive is uniquely qualified to handle the job.

"Throughout his career, Ralph has shown the ability to adapt to a variety of high-pressure environments while leading some of the world's elite players," Botterill said in a statement. "His strong communication skills, leadership and diverse background make him a uniquely qualified candidate to lead our team going forward."

The last time Krueger coached hockey was in 2016, when he led Team Europe in the World Cup of Hockey. He also coached

Switzerland in international play for more than a decade. Krueger posted a 19-22-7 record in his 2012-13 stint with the Oilers and drew praise for his work with younger players.

From 2014 until last month, Krueger served as chairman of the Premier League club Southampton FC. He told The Athletic last month that his experience there will translate to the NHL.

"Now I've had the opportunity to be that person who creates a culture where you try to have it that everybody can really find their potential and find out what they're made of," Krueger said. "So my evolution has been neat that way. Now six years into this, if someone is asking me about the NHL, your brain goes to a similar role."

The Sabres finished with the NHL's fifth-worst record in 2018-19, winning just 16 of their final 57 games.

The most critical tasks facing Krueger and Botterill this off-season include re-signing center Jeff Skinner and preparing for next month's draft, where Buffalo has the No. 7 overall pick.



Tuukka Rask of the Boston Bruins makes a save against the Carolina Hurricanes during the third period in Game Three of the Eastern Conference Finals during the 2019 NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs at PNC Arena in Raleigh, North Carolina. (Getty Images/AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Two decades after second major win, Tiger still hungry

'He has probably found a better balance to his golfing life'

AFP
Bethpage, United States

Tiger Woods pondered 20 years ago if he was destined to be a one-major wonder, but the reigning Masters champion remains golf's biggest star despite an epic fall from grace.

Woods, who ended an 11-year major win drought last month at Augusta National, competes for a 16th major title starting Thursday at the 101st PGA Championship at Bethpage Black.

The 43-year-old American could match the all-time US PGA record of 82 wins set by Sam Snead and return to the world number one ranking for the first time since March 2013.

"It's great to be part of the narrative," Woods said.

"My narrative spans 20 years now... You're measured in decades. Because of the nature of the sport, we're able to hang around a lot longer and still be relevant."

Woods won his first major at the 1997 Masters but his second came at the 1999 PGA Championship at Medinah, when he held off Spanish teen upstart Sergio Garcia and launched a run of seven wins in 11 majors, including the "Tiger Slam" of four in a row in 2000-2001.

"That was a big moment because at the time I'd won one major by 12 shots and hadn't won since then, and it was a big deal to get a second major championship and get the numbers to start to accrue," Woods said.

"To be able to hang in there and somehow get that done, it just helped keep the momentum going from '97 and then not winning anything in '98. It just started the momentum and you can see what happens in 2000, 2001 and 2002. But '99 was a big moment to kick start all that transpired."

And what a journey it has been. Woods appeared destined to break the record of 18 major wins set by Jack Nicklaus after collecting his 14th at the 2008 US Open despite playing Torrey Pines on a broken left leg.

But he lost his first major when ahead after 54 holes to South Korean Yang Yong-eun at the 2009 PGA.

Three months later, the revelation of a sex scandal led to divorce while knee and back injuries took a toll on his game.

Woods feared he might never live a normal life due to back pain until 2017 spinal fusion surgery allowed him to return to golf. In 2018 he won the Tour Championship and contended in two majors and last month he



Tiger Woods catches a ball as he practices on the driving range for the PGA Championship golf tournament at Bethpage State Park - Black Course. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

Spieth not distracted by career grand slam thoughts at PGA Championship

Jordan Spieth says he is not wasting time thinking about completing the career grand slam as he begins a third bid to seal a full set of major titles at this week's PGA Championship.

The 25-year-old American is not among the favourites at Bethpage Black this week given his recent form, but he feels the day will come when he completes his major collection. "Not much, honestly," he said when asked about how much time in his preparations he has spent contemplating the career grand slam. "Certainly every PGA Championship week I understand that that's going to be the case, and I think I'd be the sixth person, which would be a pretty unique fraternity to be in there," Spieth told his pre-tournament news conference.

"That would be a dream come true for me.

But I also recognise that if I continue to stay healthy and play well, I'll have, I don't know, 30 chances at it. One of them is bound to go my way, right?" Spieth's last victory came at the 2017 British Open at Royal Birkdale, a triumph that gave him the third leg of the career grand slam. He has been struggling this season, however, to regain his status among Golf's elite. The former world number one is now 39th in the rankings and has yet to finish in the top 20 of any tournament this season as he works on fixing some technical aspects of his game.

"My setup got a little bit lazy, and instead of finding that out, my swing started to kind of go up instead of around me, and I'm trying to get it right back to where it was in 2017 where I was first in tee to green on the (PGA) Tour," said Spieth.

"I can kind of do what I'm trying to do, but to consistently time it is just going to take a little bit of time."

Spieth's chances of completing his collection of grand slam titles this week could depend heavily on playing conditions at Bethpage Black, which do not bode well for him given recent rain that has left the course soft and soggy.

"I seem to play better Golf in major championships when courses are firmer, quicker greens, and the scores are closer to par than when it's long, soft and you've got to still go low," said Spieth, who will play the first two rounds with world number one Dustin Johnson and Spaniard Jon Rahm. "That's just when I look back. If I'm on, I feel like it doesn't matter, but if I'm a little bit off, then it's nicer if it's on that side of things for me."

took a fifth green jacket at the Masters. "Anything post these back surgeries is a bonus," four-time major winner Rory McIlroy said of Woods. "I still don't think people understand what he did in April and coming back and with everything that he's been through. It's unbelievable."

"Whether it's the greatest comeback in sports, that's probably up for debate, but from what I've experienced and the things that he said when I've been around him, to be 2 1/2

years ago from looking like may-be not playing golf again to winning the first major of the year and being the favorite going into the second, that's unbelievable."

Sixth-ranked Woods tees off Thursday alongside British Open champion Francesco Molinari of Italy and defending champion Brooks Koepka, who seeks a third consecutive US Open title next month at Pebble Beach. McIlroy, Koepka, England's Justin Rose and Woods all have a chance to overtake

American Dustin Johnson for the world number one ranking.

Woods is finding a new path to success in his second act, as Irish three-time major winner Pádraig Harrington noticed.

"He's more comfortable with who he is at the moment. He has probably found a better balance to his golfing life," Harrington said. "His game looks solid. He's hitting lots of greens in regulation. At Augusta, he closed it out. He just was interested in getting the job done. That's a

tough Tiger to beat when he's in that frame of mind."

Getting a second chance at stardom after nearly losing it has Woods in a perfect situation, McIlroy said. "He's in a different space in his life and he just seems very grateful for this opportunity to do what he loves and compete," McIlroy said. "When you're in that headspace where you're just thankful to be out there, good things happen, and good things have started to happen for him."

FOCUS

Koepka eyes 10 majors, says they're often easiest to win

AFP
Bethpage, United States

Defending champion Brooks Koepka sees major tournaments such as this week's PGA Championship as often the easiest events to win and hopes to capture at least 10 before he's done.

The calm and confident 29-year-old American is already a three-time major winner and has lifted two of the past four major trophies entering this week's showdown at Bethpage Black.

"I think sometimes the majors are the easiest ones to win," Koepka said Tuesday. "Half the people shoot themselves out of it and mentally I know I can beat most of them, and then from there it's those guys left, who's going to play good and who can win."

That's why third-ranked Koepka has set his sights on a double-digit major haul, one that would put him no worse than fourth on the all-time major win list and ahead of such legends as Arnold Palmer, Ben Hogan and Gary Player.

"I don't see any reason it can't get to double digits," Koepka said. "I think you keep doing what you're supposed to do, you play good, you peak at the right times, I don't see any reason it can't."

There are 155 opponents who would see themselves as obstacles, but Koepka clinically knocks down those odds. "You figure at least 80 of them I'm just going to beat," Koepka said. "You figure about half of them won't play well from there, so you're down to about maybe 35."

And then from 35, some of them, pressure is going to get to them. It only leaves you with a few more, and you've just got to beat those guys."

Third-ranked Koepka would become the first player to be back-to-back reigning champion at two majors at the same time by winning this week. He chases a third consecutive US Open triumph next month at Pebble Beach.

"I have the trophy," Koepka

said. "I'm playing really good. The last time we played this championship, I won. I like my chances this week. If I do what I'm supposed to do, then I think I'd be tough to beat. But at the end of the day, you never know what's going to happen. You've got to go out and play four good days."

Koepka, however, has learned that you don't have to lead it until the end.

"One of the big things that I've learned over the last few years is you don't need to try to go win it. Just hang around," Koepka said. "If you hang around, good things are going to happen."

"I think that's what's kind of caused me an issue in the regular PGA Tour events. I've gone out on Saturday and tried to build a cushion, maybe pressed a little bit too hard and gotten ahead of myself, where in the majors I just stay in the moment. I never think one hole ahead. I dummy it down and make it very simple and I think that's what helps me."

"I keep things maybe more low key this week, more a relaxed atmosphere. Sometimes you can out-psyche yourself, so I just don't let that bug me."

KOEPKA: NO TIGER RIVALRY
Once a club-smashing college hothead, Koepka now works to hide emotions from rivals.

"I'm very stone-faced, very focused, but I also don't want to give guys an idea of what's going on," he said.

"I'm not nervous at all. I don't feel the pressure. Pressure comes when you're thinking about results."

And he's not interested in being named the latest rival to Tiger Woods.

"I don't see it as a rivalry. It's just golf," Koepka said. "It's not like there's a huge history there, although it is fun to play against him, best player to ever play the game."

And Koepka proudly declares he has no fear of Woods.

"What's the point in fearing anybody? We're not fighting," Koepka said. "He's not going to knock my teeth in. He's not going to hurt me. So what's there to be afraid of?"



In this file photo taken on October 21, 2018, Brooks Koepka of the US reacts after winning putt on the eighteenth hole during the final round of the CJ Cup golf tournament at Nine Bridges golf club in Jeju Island. (AFP)

COMMENT

Tiger to carting Daly: 'I walked with a broken leg'

AFP
Bethpage, United States

Tiger Woods had a few choice words Tuesday for John Daly, who will be using a cart in this week's PGA Championship at Bethpage Black because of right knee arthritis.

The PGA of America approved two-time major winner Daly's request to use a cart, making the 53-year-old American the first player since compatriot Casey Martin in the 1998 and 2012 US Opens to use a cart in a major championship. "As far as JD taking a cart, well, I walked with a broken leg, so..." Woods said, letting the sentence drift into silence.

Woods recalled how he hobbled across Torrey Pines in the 2008 US Open for 91 holes to defeat Rocco Mediate and capture his 14th major title -- his last until capturing last month's Masters to end an 11-year major win drought.

Woods limped over 72 regulation holes plus an 18-hole playoff and a sud-

den-death hole, then underwent left knee surgery two days later and didn't play against until February 2009.

Daly won the 1991 PGA Championship, earning a lifetime exemption to the tournament, and the 1995 British Open.

PGA of America officials said Daly applied to use the cart over the hilly 7,459-yard course through the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"John went through the process, sent in the information that we request of any and all players that this applies to," said PGA of America chief championships officer Kerry Haigh.

"We have a committee that meet, which includes a medical expert, and they review the information, and it was agreed that it justified the use of a golf cart for the championship."

Haigh will speak with Daly regarding the cart and exactly where he is able to drive on a course that has absorbed nearly two inches of rain in as many days. "Where the player goes all depends on the golf course and the conditions," Haigh said. "With the rain, I will

meet with John and just talk through where he can go and can't go.

"There are some places on this golf course where you can't get a golf cart to. We try and use common sense, what's reasonable, what's fair for the protection both of the player and those issues as well as the playing of a major championship. "We supply the golf cart for him along with a number of rules of what they can and can't do with that golf cart."

The PGA of America also supplies carts for 50-and-over events. PGA of America chief executive officer Seth Waugh noted the warning sign at Bethpage Black's first tee which notes the layout is "an extremely difficult course" recommended only "for highly skilled golfers."

"Yeah, that warning sign is for real. It's a big ol' golf course, and you've got to be ready for it. It's tackle football, both playing it and walking it," Waugh said. "I can understand why he'd be daunted by trying to walk this. This is a proper golf course and every hole essentially has elevation change."



John Daly of the United States drives his golf cart down the first fairway during a practice round prior to the 2019 PGA Championship at the Bethpage Black course in Farmingdale, New York. (Getty Images/AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Marathon star Radcliffe visits Aspire Zone Foundation

The renowned British marathon runner Paula Radcliffe visited Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) yesterday morning and got a closer view of the role AZF's member organisations - Aspire Academy, Aspetar, and Aspire Logistics - are playing in transforming Qatar into an international sports hub.

The runner went on a tour at Aspire Academy where she had the chance to witness the Academy's philosophy and its world-class services and facilities aimed at nurturing talented student-athletes.

The next stop was at Aspetar, the orthopaedic and sports medicine hospital and AZF member organisation where she was impressed by their state-of-the-art rehabilitation services and was welcomed by Khalid Ali al-Mawlawi, Chief Administrative Officer. Towards the end of her visit, Radcliffe visited Khalifa International Stadium, the first stadium ready



British marathon runner Paula Radcliffe at the Khalifa International Stadium during her visit to the Aspire Zone Foundation. (Right) Paula Radcliffe with Aspetar Chief Administrative Officer Khalid Ali al-Mawlawi.

to host the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, where she was welcomed by Hassan Ali al-Mansoori, head of

Khalifa International Stadium. The marathon runner expressed her admiration for the venue

and Aspire's world-class facilities, saying: "I look forward to the upcoming IAAF World Athlet-

ics Championships in September. I can just imagine how fantastic the atmosphere will be at Khalifa

International Stadium during the tournament. "I am amazed at the quality and breadth of the services

offered by Aspire in developing world-class athletes. It was a great visit indeed," she added.



CRICKET

Jayed, Das shine in Bangladesh's win over Ireland

Ireland opener Paul Stirling's fine century and captain William Porterfield's 94 go in vain

AFP
Dublin

Paul Stirling's century and 94 from captain William Porterfield were insufficient to prevent Bangladesh beating Ireland by six wickets in a triangular series one-day international in Dublin yesterday.

Stirling struck eight fours and four sixes in his 130 from 141 balls.

The opener added 174 with Porterfield, the key stand in an Ireland total of 292 for eight.

But with Bangladesh's Abu Jayed, who dismissed both batsmen, taking five for 58, Ireland's total looked short of being a truly competitive score.

And Irish hopes of a consolation win in this dead rubber, ahead of Sunday's final between Bangladesh and the West Indies, were duly dashed as the Tigers replied with 294 for four with seven overs to spare.

Tamim Iqbal and Liton Das, filling in for the rested Soumya Sarkar, put on 117 for the first wicket in reply.

Both batsmen went past fifty, with Tamim making 57 before he was bowled by Boyd Rankin while Das made 76 before succumbing to Barry McCarthy.

Shakib Al Hasan kept the momentum going with an even 50 but was then forced to retire hurt with a side injury - a worrying sign for Bangladesh just weeks away from the start of the World Cup in England and Wales.

BRIEF SCORES

Bangladesh 294 for 4 (Liton 76, Tamim 57) beat Ireland 292 for 8 (Stirling 130, Porterfield 94, Jayed 5-58) by six wickets.



Bangladesh's Abu Jayed Rahi bowls during the Tri-Nation Series match against Ireland at the Clontarf Cricket Club Ground in Clontarf, Dublin, yesterday. (AFP)

FOCUS

Kohli defends leaving out Pant for World Cup

AFP
New Delhi

India picked veteran Dinesh Karthik over rising talent Rishabh Pant for the World Cup because of his composure under pressure, captain Virat Kohli said in an interview released yesterday.

The selection of the 33-year-old Karthik in the 15-member squad was sharply criticised by some former cricketers who felt the 21-year-old Pant should have been given a chance.

Since making his debut in 2018, Pant has impressed with his batting, including a maiden Test century in England.

He scored 488 runs from 16 matches in the just-finished Indian Premier League, while Karthik made 253 runs from 14 games. Both players are vying for the reserve wicketkeeper slot behind former skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

"In pressure situations, he (Karthik) has shown composure. It was something that everybody on board was convinced about. He has the experience," Kohli

told the *Times of India* newspaper.

"If, god forbid, something happens to M S (Dhoni), Karthik can be immensely valuable behind the wickets. As a finisher, he's done well.

"So, it was the overall exposure to a tournament of this magnitude that was taken into primary consideration," said Kohli.

After making his debut in 2004, Karthik has played 91 one-day internationals while Pant has five to his name.

Kohli, who will be leading In-

dia for the first time at the World Cup, said he was not bothered about the constant attention he gets as a batsman and captain.

"I don't want to be the centre of everything. Nobody wants that. But when your intent is to make the team win, eventually you end up doing things which are always going to be seen," said Kohli, the world's number one Test and one-day player.

"I would always put my body on the line for the team."

India are chasing their third World Cup after wins in 1983 and 2011.



India captain Virat Kohli.

DECISION

Morgan banned for fourth ODI for slow over-rate

AFP
Bristol, United Kingdom

England will have to find a new captain for the fourth one-day international against Pakistan tomorrow after skipper Eoin Morgan was banned from the match by the International Cricket Council for a slow over-rate offence.

Morgan was sanctioned after World Cup hosts and favourites England took around four hours to bowl their 50 overs in a six-wicket win over Pakistan in the third ODI at Bristol on Tuesday.

He was also fined 40 percent of his match fee and his players 20 percent of theirs after match referee Richie Richardson ruled England were two overs short after time allowances were taken into consideration.

As Morgan had previously been found guilty of a minor over-rate offence during the Barbados ODI against the West Indies on February 22, this latest incident constituted his second minor over-rate offence within a 12-month period and so led to a one-game ban.

"The suspension means Morgan will miss the fourth ODI against Pakistan in Nottingham on Friday," said an ICC statement issued yesterday.

England pacer Chris Woakes, who led the attack with four for 67 from his maximum 10 overs, said being without Morgan was far from ideal.

"Of course you don't want to lose the captain, particularly in the form that he's in," said Woakes, speaking before Morgan's ban was announced.

"It's one of those things, we probably need to be quicker. We can deal with it, we've obviously got some exceptional players on the sidelines but losing Morgs would be a huge loss for a game so we don't want that to happen," he added.

England, who were resting leg-spinner Adil Rashid, opted for just seven overs of specialist



slow bowling in Bristol - including six from off-spinner Moeen Ali. "Obviously Rashid (Rashid) the majority of the time will bowl 10 overs as will Mo - Mo only got through six," said Woakes.

Pakistan's 358 for nine - a seemingly challenging total that England overhauled with ease thanks mainly to a brilliant century opening stand between Jonny Bairstow (128) and Jason Roy (76) - featured plenty of boundaries.

"When the ball's disappearing to the fence, sometimes you need to reassess and take that extra minute to decide what your plan is going to be and execute it," Woakes added.

"But it's too long, it needs to be shorter than that."

England may well have rested Morgan for at least one game in order to give vice-captain Jos Buttler more leadership experience ahead of a World Cup starting later this month.

As it is, star batsman Buttler, rested at Bristol, could now return as captain for tomorrow's match at Nottingham's Trent Bridge. Buttler has already captained

Morgan's cumulative punishment will not roll over into the World Cup, with an ICC spokeswoman telling AFP that all players taking part would start the tournament with a "clean slate". Bairstow was also officially reprimanded by former West Indies captain Richardson for smashing his stumps in frustration.

English cricket chiefs admit Hundred 'mistakes' as draft announced

English cricket bosses have accepted they made mistakes in promoting "The Hundred", their controversial new short-form tournament that is due to start next year. The England and Wales Cricket Board faced huge public criticism for suggesting the 100-balls-per-side competition was aimed at attracting a new audience as opposed to existing fans. Questions have also been raised about whether there is a need for another short-form event in an already congested calendar, given the success of Twenty20 matches and the new competition's potential impact on English cricket's existing 18 first-class counties.

Yesterday, the ECB confirmed that a televised player draft for The Hundred would be held on October 20, ahead of the inaugural competition, starting in July 2020. Yet more than two

years on from when county bosses first discussed the eight-team city-based concept, the ECB has still to confirm team names and venues for the five-week event.

"We've definitely made mistakes in the build-up, but this is about the future of the game. This is about growing cricket," said ECB chief executive Tom Harrison.

The ECB have long insisted The Hundred is essential in attracting the next generation of cricket supporters.

According to their research, just five percent of British children aged six to 15 list cricket in their top two favourite sports.

"We have the ability to extend our fanbase into young families, diverse communities and young people to give them an experience they potentially haven't felt through the current offerings," said Harrison.