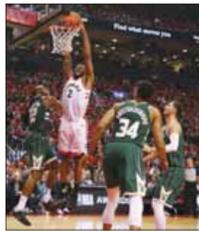


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NBA | Page 5

Raptors thump Bucks to level East Conference finals at 2-2

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GULF TIMES SPORT

With the world at her feet, Osaka takes Paris in her stride

Page 2

FOCUS

Sanchez names 28-man Qatar squad for Copa

By Sports Reporter Doha

Coach Felix Sanchez yesterday announced a 28-member Qatar squad for the Copa America to be held in Brazil from June 14 to July 7.

The list includes all players who represented Qatar during their historic Asian Cup triumph in the UAE earlier this year, most notably Karim Boudiaf and Bas-sam al-Rawi, who had missed their recent club matches due to injuries.

Al Duhail's Ismail Mohamed, who missed the entire season due to injury and Al Gharafa's

Mahdi Ali have been also included in the squad which will be holding a training camp in Texas before flying out to Brazil.

A large number of players in the squad are from Al Sadd and Al Duhail, the top sides in Qatar. However, not a single player from Al Rayyan, who finished fourth in the QNB Stars League, has made the team.

The squad will be pruned to 23 after Qatar's friendly against Brazil at the historic Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro on June 5. They will also play a closed doors match against a Brazilian club side on June 9 before their first Copa America match against Paraguay on June 16.

They meet their other Group

B rivals Colombia on June 20 and Argentina on June 23.

SQUAD: Saad al-Sheeb, Tariq Salman, Boualem Khoukhi, Hassan al-Haydos, Akram Afif, Hamid Ismail, Salem al-Hajri, Abdelkarim Hassan and Pedro (Al Sadd); Almoez Ali, Bassam al-Rawi, Karim Boudiaf, Aasim Madibo, Ali Afif, Ismail Mohamed, Abdulla Abdul Salam and Sultan al-Brake (Al Duhail); Youssef Hassan, Abdulaziz Hatem, Ahmed Alaa, Tamim al-Muhaize and Mahdi Ali (Al Gharafa); Musab al-Khater and Ahmed Fathi (Al Arabi); Mohamed Bakri (Al Khor), Abdul Aziz al-Ansari (Al Kharaitiyah), Ahmed Mo'in (Qatar Sports Club) and Abdurrahman Mohamed (Al Ahli)



Qatar coach Felix Sanchez.

CRICKET

Kohli's India boast firepower to make World Cup charge

AFP
New Delhi

India boast the game's undoubted superstar batsman in Virat Kohli but their bowling attack could hold the key to their hopes of World Cup glory.

Despite their status as the game's global powerhouse, India have only won the showpiece tournament twice, in 1983 and 2011.

But Kohli's men, second behind England in the one-day international rankings, will start the tournament in England and Wales among the favourites alongside the host nation and defending champions Australia.

For all the focus on captain Kohli, the number one batsman in the world in the 50-over format and Test cricket, the ability of India's seamers to exploit the conditions could be the most important factor.

Jasprit Bumrah, the top-ranked ODI bowler in the world, leads the pace battery alongside Mohammed Shami, Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Hardik Pandya.

Wrist spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal add variety to India's attack.

Former India skipper Rahul Dravid believes the tournament could be a high-scoring affair.

"I believe, having experienced some of the conditions in England last year with the A-team tour, it would be a high-scoring World Cup," he told Star Sports.

"And in a high-scoring World Cup, having bowlers who can take wickets in the middle will be very important. I think India is lucky in that regard.

"People like (Jasprit) Bumrah, Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal... (India have) got bowlers who can take wickets."

The 25-year-old Bumrah, with his ability to bowl yorkers at the death, has picked up 85 wickets in 49 ODI matches since making his international debut in January 2016.

Yadav and Chahal did not have a great Indian Premier League season but have played an im-

portant role in India's recent successes.

And former India batsman Sanjay Manjrekar told AFP that the spin twins could have a crucial role to play for India, who kick off their World Cup campaign against South Africa in Southampton on June 5.

"In T20 cricket if you don't have anything in the pitch for these spinners then the batsmen, by sloggling them, have a tendency to get the better of these guys," he said.

"In the 50-over World Cup, in the middle stages, that kind of pressure won't be there on these two guys."

KOHLI FACTOR

Kohli, 30, has scored more than 19,000 runs across all formats of the international game and shone during India's tour of England last year, despite defeats in the Test and ODI series for the visitors.

But the rest of the batting line-up appears far from settled, with Lokesh Rahul and all-rounder Vijay Shankar vying for the number four spot after Rohit Sharma, Shikhar Dhawan and Kohli in the top three positions.

Kedar Jadhav and MS Dhoni are expected to form the core of the middle order.

"I don't think the Indian batting looks settled. Virat Kohli is the only guy that gets me very excited," said Manjrekar, who admitted Dhoni's IPL form had been good.

All-rounders Pandya and Shankar will also be crucial to India's chances of making the final four in the round-robin event.

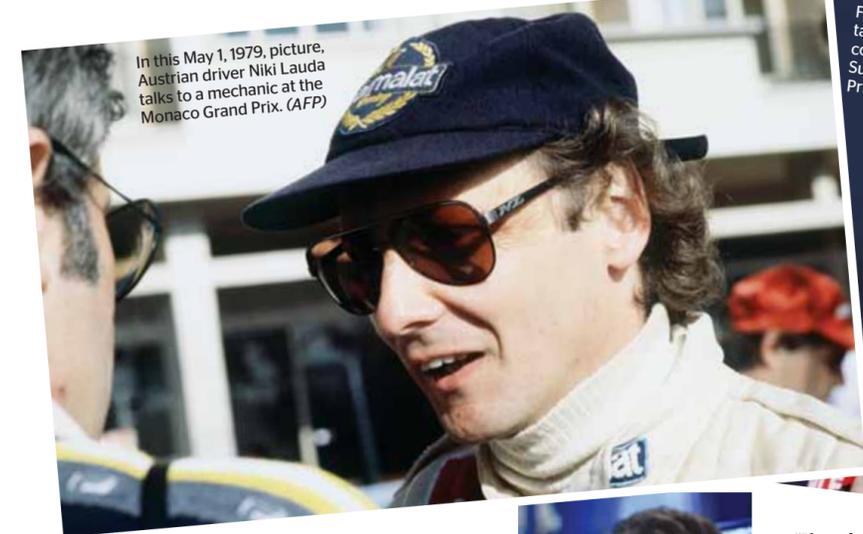
An attacking middle-order batsman, a medium-fast bowler and quick in the field, Pandya has the ability to turn games single-handedly.

The 25-year-old Pandya, who earlier this year was suspended over sexist remarks on a TV chat show, is fresh from winning the IPL title with Mumbai Indians and keen to focus his energies on his first 50-over World Cup.

"There is no one even close to Hardik Pandya's talent with both bat and ball," former India opener Virender Sehwag told cricket-next website.

FORMULA 1

Leclerc dream and Lauda memories stir Monaco emotions



In this May 1, 1979, picture, Austrian driver Niki Lauda talks to a mechanic at the Monaco Grand Prix. (AFP)



Ferrari's Charles Leclerc takes part in a press conference ahead of the Sunday's Monaco Grand Prix yesterday. (Reuters)

Mercedes have sentiment on their side, Leclerc hopes to make most of home advantage

Reuters
Monaco

Charles Leclerc will race around his home streets in a Ferrari for the first time in Sunday's Monaco Grand Prix, a boyhood dream come true, but dominant Mercedes also have sentiment on their side.

The death on Monday night of Austrian Formula One great Niki Lauda, a triple world champion and non-executive director of the Mercedes team, has cast the showcase race into a different light.

A week ago there were those who feared a sixth successive Mercedes one-two finish, at a tight and twisty track that has seen plenty of processions in the past, would have the fans turning off in droves.

Now that looks more like a fitting tribute to a man who won his titles with McLaren and Ferrari but would have been cheering on the Silver Arrows of Lewis Hamilton and Valtteri Bottas as loudly as anyone.

Various tributes are expected for one of the sport's greatest characters, who won for Ferrari in Monaco in 1975 and 1976.

Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff said his compatriot had been a guiding light.

"As a team-mate over the past six and a half years, Niki was always brutally honest - and utterly loyal," he said.

"It was a privilege to count him among our team and moving to witness just how much it meant to him to be part of the team's success."

Hamilton leads Bottas by seven points going into one of the Briton's favourite races, and one



A picture of late F1 driver Niki Lauda is seen on a Red Bull Toro Rosso car ahead of the Monaco GP yesterday. (AFP)

he has won twice already, and the characteristics of the car suggest Mercedes will again be frontrunners.

"If you look at their performance in the low-speed section of this (Barcelona) circuit, you would expect them to be very strong (in Monaco)," Red Bull boss Christian Horner said after Hamilton won in Spain 10 days ago.

"They'll certainly be very much the favourites."

Red Bull won last year from pole position with Daniel Ricciardo, but the Australian has moved to Renault and Max Verstappen is the main hope now.

The young Dutchman does not have such happy memories of the track, wrecking his chances last year by hitting the wall in Saturday's final practice and lining up last.

"Looking at the low-speed performance in the last sector (in Spain), we are clearly not the favourite and I also don't expect it to be like last year when we were super strong in Monaco," he said.

Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel is a two-times Monaco winner but much of the attention will be on Leclerc, who was born in the principality and can become the first local driver to score points

at home since Louis Chiron in the 1950s.

A first career F1 win for the Monegasque, who crashed out last year on his debut with Sauber, would be truly momentous.

"It's my first home GP as a Ferrari driver and it's bound to be a special weekend," he said.

"I remember as a kid, I would spend the afternoon with a friend who lived in a flat with a balcony overlooking the Ste. Devote corner. We used to play with toy cars while the real ones rushed past beneath us.

"I always told myself that one day, it would be great to be driving in this race."

Ricciardo, who has finished only once in the points this year with a best result of seventh, is unlikely to be standing on top of the podium on Sunday but the Australian does expect a better showing.

"I've done it before so it's familiar territory. I'm really curious actually to see how I perform this year in Monaco," he told Reuters. "I think we can get a good result. Maybe our best of the year. We'll see."



In this March 1, 2019, India cricket team captain Virat Kohli (centre) talks to his team members during a practice session ahead of the first ODI against Australia in Hyderabad, India. (AFP)

TENNIS

With the world at her feet, Osaka takes Paris in her stride

'Grand Slams to me are like a playground, I have a lot of fun there'



Naomi Osaka of Japan poses with fans after winning her women's singles third round match against Julia Goerges of Germany at the China Open in Beijing on October 4, 2018. (AFP)

AFP
Paris

Twelve months ago at Roland Garros, an embarrassed Naomi Osaka bristled at being hailed as the 'coolest thing' in tennis.

Now, however, the 21-year-old Japanese returns to Paris as comfortably the sport's hottest ticket with the world number one billing, a bank balance bursting at the seams and on the brink of a third successive Grand Slam title.

"The one word that comes to my mind is amazing," says Osaka's older sister Mari, a fellow tour player.

"I'm really proud of her." Naomi Osaka was seeded at a Grand Slam for the first time at the 2018 French Open when she

made the third round, countering claims she was the 'coolest thing in tennis' by asserting she was the sport's 'most awkward person'.

But it was the razzle-dazzle of New York – helped by a meltdown by Serena Williams – which propelled her to a maiden Slam triumph in September.

That was backed up by a second major at the Australian Open, her status as the face of the new generation of women's tennis comfortably confirmed.

Osaka, the daughter of a Haitian father and Japanese mother, has since been signed up by Nike in a deal reportedly worth in the region of \$10 million a year.

Despite being based full-time in the United States and still often struggling with the Japanese language, sponsors from home have come calling – from

an airline and car-maker to a noodle company and detergent manufacturer. In Japan, her coy personality and breezy news conferences have made her into a media darling. 'Naomi-speak' was among the most searched phrases online in 2018.

"She's multicultural, multinational, multiracial," Stuart Duguid, Osaka's agent and an IMG executive, told Britain's *Financial Times*.

'GRAND SLAMS ARE PLAYGROUNDS'

However, fame still sits uncomfortably with Osaka whose career earnings have already rocketed past the \$11 million mark.

In the wake of her Australian Open triumph, she shocked tennis by splitting with coach Sascha Bajin, one of the masterminds of her meteoric rise.

Her 2019 results, meanwhile, have been steady rather than spectacular – she hasn't reached another final since Melbourne while her clay court season has been blighted by injury.

An abdominal strain forced a pullout from Stuttgart while a hand injury sparked an early departure from Rome last week.

Not that Osaka is getting too down on herself.

"Grand Slams to me are like a playground, I have a lot of fun there," she said ahead of Sunday's French Open start.

Clay courts, too, are becoming bearable for a player whose power game traditionally thrives on faster courts.

At Roland Garros last year, Osaka was serving at 121mph (196.2kph), a speed matched only by Serena Williams.

This year alone, she has un-

leashed 184 aces across all surfaces.

"I think for me, I'm kind of comfortable with clay now. It's just like I randomly slip. I feel like if I can get that under control, I'll be good."

Her status in the women's game in general will endure even wider exposure in 2020 when she is likely to shape the image of the Tokyo Olympics.

It's all a far cry from the days when Mari used to get the better of her younger sibling when they were growing up in the US.

Back then, Naomi always had that something extra even if it wasn't immediately apparent.

"Sometimes I think she was throwing the matches on purpose just so that we could finish practice quicker," recalls Mari.

"So the moment she started trying, I was getting pissed off."

SPOTLIGHT

Zverev seeks to rediscover spark

Reuters
Paris

On the court Alexander Zverev has proved adept at shouldering the expectation heaped on him since his early teens, but off it the job of handling the business side of his tennis career is proving a more onerous task.

So much so that the 22-year-old German will head to the French Open sounding just a little world weary and with few backing him to match or even better last year's run to the quarter-finals, still his best Grand Slam showing.

When Zverev beat Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic back-to-back to win the ATP Finals last November at London's O2 Arena it felt like a launchpad to the Grand Slam titles long-predicted for the blonde-haired Hamburg native. Yet this season has been a let-down since reaching the Acapulco final in early March and putting together any sustained form has proved beyond his capabilities.

The slump has coincided with an ongoing legal wrangle with former manager Patricio Apey, which has left Zverev with far more to worry about than just rocking up for his practice sessions.

Until that situation is resolved he is effectively running "Sacha Zverev Inc" on his own and it is clearly having a detrimental effect on his tennis.

ENERGY CONSUMING

"I am a young guy that is trying to build a brand as well," Zverev, coached jointly by his father Alexander and Ivan Lendl, said recently at the Italian Open this month where he

suffered a second-round loss to Matteo Berrettini.

"It's just time consuming. It's energy consuming. Obviously you have to deal with a lot of different things. I have to deal with lawyers. I have to deal with obviously management stuff because I don't have anyone. I have to kind of do it myself right now."

Zverev arrived at Roland Garros a year ago brimming with joie de vivre after winning the Madrid title and reaching the final in Rome. This clay-court season has been a grind.

"Last year, the reason why I was playing so good, all I was doing was playing tennis," he said.

"Everything else was taken care for me. I was going to bed, I was waking up, thinking about how practice was, after practice I was thinking about what to eat, then practice again, go to bed.

"Now it's more like I have to wake up, I have to think about, okay, I got this and this email, I have to respond to this and this person, I have to make a phone call, do that, then I have to practice. It's a lot more things."

With approaching \$17 million already banked in prize money, sympathy might be in short supply, but tennis fans will hope that Zverev will rediscover his spark soon and continue jousting with other rising forces such as Greek Stefanos Tsitsipas.

He described his defeat by Berrettini as "horrendous" and rather than rest up ahead of the French Open he is playing this week in Geneva hoping to play himself back into form.

"For me, it is about playing well. Once I play well, I know that I can be on a court with anybody. And this is the most important for me," he said.



Germany's Alexander Zverev celebrates during his third round match against Italy's Fabio Fognini at Monte Carlo Masters on April 18, 2019. (Reuters)

FOCUS

IOC recommends Boxing keeps its place in Tokyo but not under AIBA

Reuters
Lausanne, Switzerland

Boxing should keep its place at next year's Olympic Games but recognition of AIBA, the governing body of the sport's amateur version, should be suspended, the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) executive board recommended yesterday.

The IOC said in a statement that it would instead set up a task force to organise the Boxing competitions, including the qualification events to be held between January and May.

The recommendations followed an IOC inquiry into the finances and governance of AIBA which has been in turmoil for years.

AIBA says it has undergone a profound reform programme in the last 18 months and done everything that has been asked of it but the IOC said that "there has been a lack of satisfactory progress".

"Today's decision was taken in the interest of the athletes and the sport of Boxing. We want to ensure that the athletes can live their dream and participate in the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020," IOC President Thomas Bach told

reporters. "At the same time, we offer a pathway back to lifting the suspension, but there needs to be further fundamental change."

The recommendations will be put to a full IOC session in Lausanne in June. The IOC added that AIBA's status should be reviewed after the Games.

While the IOC organises the Olympic Games as a whole, the federations run their own sports competitions within that framework.

Suspension would rob AIBA of its main source of funding and be a devastating blow to the body which has organised Olympic Boxing for 73 years.

AIBA president Gafur Rahimov suspended himself from the post in March because of his presence on a US Treasury Department sanctions list "for providing material support" to a criminal organisation. The Uzbek strongly denies the allegations.

He has been replaced on an interim basis by Mohamed Moustahsane.

The IOC confirmed the total athlete quota for Boxing at the Tokyo Games would remain at 286 and the number of eight men's events and five women's events would be maintained, as previously approved.

FRENCH OPEN

Djokovic concedes he has mountain to climb

Reuters
Belgrade

World number one Novak Djokovic has enjoyed two good weeks on red clay but admitted that winning a second French Open title would be a tall order after a crushing defeat by Rafael Nadal in last week's Italian Open final.

Djokovic clinched the Madrid Open without dropping a set and then won a pair of epic battles against Argentines Juan Martin Del Potro and Diego Schwartzman in Rome before succumbing to the imperious Nadal 6-0, 4-6, 6-1 in Sunday's final.

That defeat aside, the Serb's form seems to have peaked in time for the May 26-June 9 tournament. However, the 32-year-old from Belgrade, who has won 15 Grand Slam titles, made it clear Nadal, who is the same age, was the favourite at Roland Garros.

He also named Austrian Dominic Thiem, the 25-year-old world number four, and 11th-ranked Italian Fabio Fognini,

who is 31, as strong contenders.

"Nadal (is) the number one favourite without a doubt, and then everyone else," a serene Djokovic told reporters after he was beaten by the Spaniard at the Foro Italic.

"I think it's going to be a really good tournament. Dominic Thiem has been playing some good tennis and he can beat anybody, especially on clay.

"Fognini is also playing quality tennis, he showed against Nadal in Monte Carlo what he is capable of," he added referring to the Italian's 6-4, 6-2 semi-final victory.

"On a given day, best of five (sets), with one day between matches, players will have enough time to really be at their best.

"Everybody is trying to peak for Roland Garros and I am really looking forward to it."

PATCHY FORM

Djokovic's exploits on clay came after several months of patchy form following his January triumph at the Australian Open in Melbourne where he beat Nadal in straight sets.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates winning the Madrid Open final against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas on May 12, 2019. (Reuters)

A quarter-final loss in Monte Carlo came on the back of early exits at Indian Wells and Miami, prompting speculation by pundits that Djokovic was heading for a dip in form similar to the one in 2016 after he won his

maiden French Open title.

But the Serb silenced his critics with a vintage run in Rome, including a rip-roaring victory over Del Potro when he saved two match points in the second set before dismantling

his close friend in the third.

He then held his nerve against the battling Schwarzman before running out of steam versus, leaving doubts as to whether he will have enough in the tank to match world number two Nadal for energy during the gruelling two-week event in Paris.

Djokovic has already achieved the rare feat of holding all four major honours at the same time, having won the 2015 Wimbledon and U.S. Open titles before clinching the Australian Open and French Open crowns the following year.

After two difficult years dogged by an injury which required elbow surgery and a dramatic loss of form, Djokovic bounced back spectacularly to clinch the Wimbledon and the US Open titles again in 2018 as well as this year's Australian Open.

He is certainly buoyed by the prospect of emulating his achievement of holding all four majors but knows that nothing less than perfection will be required for what would amount to a carbon copy of his most successful 12 months on tour.

FOCUS

Bangladesh aim to break new ground at World Cup

'At the moment I think going to the semi-finals will be big challenge, but nothing is impossible'

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladesh have set their sights on capping a remarkable rise by reaching the World Cup semi-finals for the first time.

Mashrafe Mortaza's arrival in England confident of making the last four on the back of impressive form that marks them as a serious threat to the established order.

Bangladesh showed they can compete with cricket's elite nations when they advanced to the Champions Trophy semi-finals two years ago from a strong group featuring England, Australia and New Zealand.

Significantly for their hopes in this edition of the World Cup, that memorable campaign came in England. It was also further proof of their emergence following a maiden World Cup quarter-final berth in 2015.

Bangladesh's group stage win against England four years ago proved to be a catalyst for the side, boosting their belief and triggering a sustained spell of success.

Between April 2015 and October 2016, Bangladesh won five one-day international series in a row against Pakistan, India, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Afghanistan. All of those series were played at home but it was still a huge sign of progress for a Bangladesh team considered as international whipping boys not so long ago.

The series wins helped Bangladesh climb the rankings, earning them automatic qualification for the Champions Trophy and the World Cup.

They maintained that consistency with 13 wins from their 20 one-day internationals in 2018 and are currently ranked seventh. Bangladesh will carry plenty of experience into the tournament in the form of captain Mashrafe, vice-captain Shakib al-Hasan, Tamim Iqbal and Mushfiqur Rahim.

'NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE'

The solid performances in recent years, combined with the presence of the veterans, has created expectations of success for Bangladesh that were unheard of in the team's five previous World Cups dating back to 1999.



Bangladesh's captain Mashrafe Mortaza holds the winners' trophy after the one-day international Tri-Nation Series final against West Indies at the Malahide Cricket Club in Dublin on May 17, 2019. (AFP)

Mashrafe says a semi-final place is their goal, but he admits it will be tough to get that far given the round-robin nature of the first stage of the 10-team tournament.

"At the moment I think going to the semi-finals will be big challenge, but nothing is impossible," Mashrafe said before leaving Dhaka for England.

"Of course it is possible, difficult though. In the past a win over one big team in the group stage might have been enough,

it would have made a comeback difficult for them. But here we have nine games.

"Those who are expecting to play in the semi-finals they will have plenty of opportunities to come back. We have to be careful about it."

While Bangladesh's biggest strength is their team unity, they have weaknesses that might hurt them on the big occasion. In an era when sides often chase down targets well in excess of 300 runs with ease,

Bangladesh may lack enough big hitters to do that.

So far, Bangladesh have successfully chased a 300-plus target only twice, against low-ranked Zimbabwe and Scotland, a record Mashrafe concedes they must improve on in this World Cup.

"You see we are not accustomed to chasing 320 or 340. At the same time, we cannot restrict the opposition to 270 or 280 on a regular basis," he said ahead of their World Cup

opener against South Africa on June 2.

"Here we have got to develop a habit. We have to fight giving everything we have."

It also remains to be seen if Bangladesh's players have completely recovered after they narrowly avoided being caught up in the New Zealand mosque attacks in March.

Many of the squad reportedly needed counselling to deal with the horrific experience before returning to domestic cricket.

SPOTLIGHT

Big Show hopes for bowling show at World Cup

Reuters
London

The bowling side of Glenn Maxwell's status as an all-rounder is often forgotten amid the fireworks of his power hitting but the mercurial Australian hopes his offspin can tie a few batsmen in knots at the World Cup.

Although used sparingly during Australia's 2015 triumph on the pace-friendly pitches of home, Maxwell chipped in with six handy wickets to go with his 324 runs in a fine all-round tournament.

Spin is expected to play a far bigger role in England, particularly with warm weather forecast for the early summer, so Maxwell can see himself playing a bigger role behind specialist spinners Nathan Lyon and Adam Zampa.

At England's compact cricket grounds, that will mean avoiding getting "hit for six most of the time," Maxwell said at training in Southampton.

"For me I suppose, a lot of the time that I bowl, I just try to limit the boundary balls," he added.

"As long as I'm doing that, if they hit some good shots off my bowling I'm not too fazed.

"If I'm limiting the boundary balls and giving myself the best chance to squeeze a few dot balls, bowl a couple of tight overs, it might create a bit of pressure at the other end."

Maxwell bowled plenty of overs in the United Arab Emirates against Pakistan and away to India in recent months as Aaron Finch's side claimed confidence-building series victories.

He gave up the chance of a rich Indian Premier League deal to warm up for the World Cup with England county side Lancashire.

In six one-day matches with Lancashire, he managed a top score of only 35 with the bat but took wickets in every game bar one. "To have that continue into my time at Lancashire, where I got plenty of time at the bowling crease, you get that rhythm, you get that feel of the ball coming out consistently," he said.

"You need that as a part-time bowler, to have that consistency of time at the crease and get a few of the cobwebs out, I suppose."

Australia's bowlers will have containment on their minds when they face West Indies and their master blasters in an unofficial warmup later on Wednesday at the Rose Bowl's Nursery ground, a field small even by English standards.

Maxwell likened the venue to Hurstville Oval, a club ground within a cycling track in Sydney's southern suburbs synonymous with big totals in domestic 50-over games.

"It's good to practice your skills under heightened pressure and what you're going to get later in the tournament," he said.



Australian all-rounder Glenn Maxwell.

Lanka snap losing streak with Scotland win

Sri Lanka snapped an eight-match one-day international losing streak ahead of the World Cup with a 35-run win over Scotland in a rain-affected match in Edinburgh on Tuesday. The Scots may not have qualified for the World Cup but last year beat tournament hosts and favourites England to prove they were well capable of causing an upset. Saturday's opener had been abandoned without a ball being bowled due to rain, but the teams had better luck with the weather second time. Dimuth Karunaratne, the new Sri Lanka captain top-scored with 77 in a total of 322 for eight - just his second fifty at this level and first since he reached

the landmark against Scotland on the same ground back in 2011. It was one of three fifties on the innings, including opening partner Avishka Fernando's maiden ODI half-century. But both batsmen men dropped off Brad Wheal. Karunaratne at first slip on 13 and Avishka on 22 at mid-off. Karunaratne received a third life on 36 when Calum MacLeod couldn't hang on to a sharp chance at mid-wicket off left-arm spinner Mark Watt. Sri Lanka pace bowler Nuwan Pradeep then took four wickets as Scotland slumped either side of being set a rain-revised target of 235, needing 103 off seven overs, and were bowled out for 199.

PROFILE

South Africa confront World Cup demons

AFP
Johannesburg

For South Africans, there is no escape from the reality of the country's bitter history of painful failure in World Cup knockout games.

"People will highlight the baggage - it's like a big mirror that is always in front of you," said South African captain Faf du Plessis before departing for England.

England was the scene of South Africa's most spectacular implosion, 20 years ago, when the World Cup was last played there.

With the scores tied in a semi-final against Australia at Edgbaston, Lance Klusener and last man Allan Donald were involved in a near-farcical run-out that enabled Australia to go through to the final.

South Africa have reached the semi-finals in four of their seven World Cup campaigns but have yet to reach a final. They have won only one of seven knockout matches, against Sri Lanka in the quarter-finals in 2015.

That rare victory was followed by a dramatic semi-final against New Zealand in Auckland, which



South Africa's captain Faf du Plessis plays a shot during the one-day practice match against the Sri Lanka Board XI in Colombo on July 26, 2018. (AFP)

ended with South African-born New Zealander Grant Elliott hitting Dale Steyn for a winning six

off the penultimate ball. Despite the frustrating history, Du Plessis believes the past

has no relevance, other than providing a lesson that his team should trust their ability and

play without a fear of failure if they reach the semi-finals this time.

"In previous World Cups, we wanted to do 'Superman' things. We thought we had to be more special, we had to do something more than we usually do, and we did not do what was good enough before," Du Plessis said.

South Africa will go into this World Cup without the burden of being among the favourites, despite having won all five of the one-day international series they have played in the past year.

DESTRUCTIVE POWER

In a tournament expected to be dominated by batsmen, it is South Africa's bowlers who will carry the country's hopes - provided they are fully fit.

Kagiso Rabada, Steyn and Lungi Ngidi are a potentially potent pace trio who will be backed by the leg-spin of Imran Tahir, the leading wicket-taker in this year's Indian Premier League.

Du Plessis said this quartet were a crucial part of his team's 'Plan A', even though it means South Africa could have a long tail as none of the specialist bowlers is a reliable batsman.

It will put a big responsibility on the top six in the batting order, although there will be a batting all-rounder, either Andile Phehlukwayo or Dwayne Pretorius, at number seven.

South Africa will also be without their former star batsman and talisman AB de Villiers, who retired from international cricket last year after a stunning career.

The team's approach might have to change, however, if one or more of the bowlers is injured, with all three fast bowlers having recent injury concerns.

Ngidi missed the IPL because of a side strain, while both Rabada and Steyn returned early from India because of back and shoulder injuries.

Steyn had yet to bowl at full pace when the team left home and is a doubt for the tournament's first match against England at The Oval on May 30.

Opening batsman Quinton de Kock will be a key player with his ability to score quickly from the start of an innings, while fellow left-handers David Miller and JP Duminy can unleash destructive power if they have been provided with a solid foundation.

Du Plessis and two of Hashim Amla, Aiden Markram and Rassie van der Dussen will be expected to provide stability.

"It's a long, long tournament," said Du Plessis. "It's not about how you get to the semi-finals, you just have to get there and then any team can win."

FORMULA 1

Tributes planned for Lauda at Monaco GP

Mercedes said members would wear black armbands and there would be a tribute on the cars

Reuters
Monaco

Formula One will honour Niki Lauda at this weekend's showcase Monaco Grand Prix, with teams and drivers yesterday still coming to terms with the triple world champion's death.

The Austrian, who died on Monday aged 70, won in Monaco with Ferrari in 1975 and 1976 but was latterly the Mercedes team's non-executive chairman and shareholder with principal Toto Wolff.

A Formula One spokesman said a tribute was in the works, with details to be confirmed. Others said a minute's silence was planned for before the race.

Finnish team mate Valtteri Bottas took the Briton's place instead, and said Hamilton seemed OK when he saw him earlier.

"He (Lauda) meant a lot to me but was a key member of ours in the race team and factory, a big part of the Mercedes family and was a massive motivation for everyone and myself as well," Bottas told reporters.

Mercedes said team members would wear black armbands from today and there would be a tribute, as yet undecided, on the cars.

Ferrari said they too would honour their late champion, who won two of his titles with the Italian team in the 1970s and came back from severe burns in a fiery near-fatal 1976 crash, on their cars. McLaren, with whom the Austrian won his third title in 1984, said they would have something on their cars too.



Haas F1 technicians practice at the Circuit de Monaco in Monte Carlo yesterday.

Photographs and television footage of Lauda's famous 1976 duel with rival and eventual champion James Hunt were being played constantly on screens in the Ferrari and Mercedes hospitality units.

British rookie George Russell, a Mercedes-backed driver who was the team's official reserve

until securing a race seat with Williams, recalled how he and Lauda used to watch MotoGP races together.

"He just loved everything racing really," he said.

"I remember at Silverstone when I won my first or second GP3 race and he was down at the podium with Toto and I

couldn't believe it really.

"I'd only been part of Mercedes for half a year and there's Niki Lauda congratulating me at the podium. He was just an amazing person."

Formula One managing director for motorsport Ross Brawn, who worked with Lauda at Mercedes in 2012, said the

Austrian had been key to Hamilton's move from McLaren, particularly in persuading the Mercedes board to part with the money.

"Niki's loss is of huge significance to Formula One," said the Briton. "Ours is a sport that revolves around larger than life personalities and Niki was one

of racing's most formidable characters.

"His presence in the paddock was a reminder that Formula One is a sport of heroes, an arena for competitors who push past common limits of fortitude and endurance and find an elevated plane beyond the ordinary. Simply, he was a legend."

ATHLETICS

Semenya to race 3,000m

AFP
Los Angeles

Two-time Olympic champion Caster Semenya will race the 3,000 metres at the Diamond League Prefontaine Classic on June 30, a distance she can contest without reducing her testosterone levels.

The South African has won two Olympic golds at 800 metres, and has insisted she will not take medication to comply with new International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) rules governing testosterone levels in women athletes that went into effect on May 8.

The new rules require women with higher than normal male hormone levels – so-called "hyperandrogenic" athletes – to artificially lower the amount of testosterone in their bodies if they are to compete in races over distances of 400m to the mile.

Semenya won the 800m at the Doha Diamond League meeting this month in her first race since losing her appeal of the controversial ruling at the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

South Africa have said they will lodge an appeal of the CAS ruling with the Switzerland Federal Tribunal citing lack of clarity over how the rules can be implemented.

Semenya's case has provoked a furious debate across sport worldwide about gender and "hyperandrogenic" athletes, those with "differences of sexual development" (DSD).

The World Medical Association has urged doctors not to enforce the rules, warning that attempts to do so would breach ethics codes.

As the debate rumbles on, the Prefontaine 3,000m will be Semenya's first race since the rules went into effect.

Prefontaine Classic meet director Tom Jordan said Semenya's agent reached out to meet officials asking if she could start in the 3,000.

RUGBY

Fiji name nine rookies

AFP
Wellington

Fiji yesterday named nine uncapped players including free-scoring Toulou winger Filippo Nakosi in their preliminary squad for this year's World Cup.

Nakosi, who has dotted down on 10 occasions in 18 games for the French club this season, is joined by fellow new faces in front-rowers Mesulame Dolokoto, Luke Tagi, Tuvare Veremalua, loose forwards Johnny Dyer, Temo Mayanavama, Jale Railala and backs Peni Matawalu and Apisai Naqalevu. There was no place for experienced wingers Nemani Nadolo and Timoci Nagusa who both play for French club Montpellier as they announced their international retirements in February. The likes of Clermont's Naqalevu, Pecheli Yato and Setareki Tuicuvu, Toulouse's Sam Matavesi, Racing 92's Leone Nakarawa and Ben Volavola as well as La Rochelle pair Levani Botia and Kiri Murimurivalu could be late joining up with the national team due to their club commitments.

"I expect by the second week of June nearly all the players will be back with the exception of any French players whose teams progress deep into finals," head coach John McKee said.

McKee said the list of players wasn't final and individuals could be added later on.

"Players can be included at any time based on them showing outstanding form and fitness level," he said. The 50-man squad will be reduced to 38 ahead of two matches against the Maori All Blacks on July 13 and July 20.

Fiji start their World Cup campaign against two-time former champions Australia on September 21 before facing Georgia, Wales and Uruguay in Pool D.

CYCLING

Ewan on the double in Giro d'Italia 11th stage

AFP
Novi Ligure

Australian Caleb Ewan won a sprint finish to take the 11th stage of the Giro d'Italia yesterday, just ahead of Frenchman Arnaud Demare.

Italian Valerio Conti, riding for UAE Emirates, kept the overall leader's pink jersey before the race heads for the first day in the Alps today.

The 24-year-old Ewan of Lotto-Soudal claimed his second stage win of this year's race, four days after winning stage eight at Pesaro. Three Italians who have been consistently active in breakaways – Marco Frapporti, Mirco Maestri and Damiano Cima – once again led a long escape in the 221km stage raced entirely in sunshine.

The trio were caught 25km from Novi Ligure, in northwestern Italy.

In the sprint, Australian Ewan chased down German champion Pascal Ackermann, who had to settle for third, a day after crashing.

Demare of Groupama-FDJ, the winner of the crash-marred 10th stage at Modena, snatched second place for a boost to overtake Ackermann at the top of the



Team Groupama-FDJ rider, France's Arnaud Demare, celebrates on podium after the stage eleven of the 102nd Giro d'Italia at Novi Ligure yesterday.

points standings.

Italian Elia Viviani, winner of four stages last year, once again fell short, finishing fourth in the sprint.

Today's 12th stage covers 156km between Cuneo and Pinerolo in the Italian Alps, the scene of Fausto Coppi's mythical long-range attack in 1949.

BADMINTON

Korean schoolgirl stuns top star Tai

AFP
Shanghai

Seventeen-year-old South Korean schoolgirl An Se-Young stunned Taiwan's world number one Tai Tzu-ying at the Sudirman Cup yesterday to burnish her fast-growing reputation.

Rising star An, who is ranked 50th in the world, roared back to defeat Tai 14-21, 21-18, 21-16 in 66 thrilling minutes in the Chinese city of Nanjing.

Taiwan and title-holders South Korea were already into the quarter-finals of the mixed-team world championships, but this was further evidence of An's precious talent.

China, Malaysia, Japan and Thailand are also into the knockout stages.

The teenager An, who won the New Zealand Open earlier this month, said: "My strategy was to defend in the beginning of each rally and then to take my opportunity."

"My coach advised me to pay attention to the front and keep the rally going. "I'm surprised I could beat her."

The 24-year-old Tai said that she had a nagging injury but did not use that as an excuse. "She's tall, powerful and has very good footwork," the Taiwanese said of her young opponent, who only turned 17 in February.

"She's good in all aspects of the game. She will be an outstanding player in future for sure." China eased to victory to send India

home and propel themselves and Malaysia into the last eight. The hosts are yet to drop a match in Nanjing, hammering Malaysia 5-0 in their opener and then dismissing India by the same comprehensive scoreline.

Along with top seeds Japan, China – the 10-time winners of the Sudirman Cup – are the favourites to lift the trophy on Sunday.

Saina Nehwal, India's 2015 world silver-medallist, was well beaten by Chen Yufei, the third-ranked Chinese winning 21-12, 21-17 in 33 minutes.

"I have had some trouble with my wrist and ankle and didn't want to push too hard," said the defeated 29-year-old, pinpointing Tuesday's loss to Malaysia as being fatal to India's hopes.

FOCUS

Hamilton excused from Monaco media briefing

AFP
Monaco

An emotional Lewis Hamilton was excused from attending an official news conference yesterday ahead of this weekend's Monaco Grand Prix, following the death of Niki Lauda.

The defending five-time world champion, 34, arrived in the Mediterranean principality, to begin preparations for the classic race and was promptly withdrawn from the media event at the request of his Mercedes team.

Hamilton, the world championship leader, was described as being emotional following the death of Lauda on Monday. He was due to attend the news briefing alongside Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc and Dutchman Max Verstappen of Red Bull.

A Mercedes spokesperson said: "We asked for Lewis to be excused in the circumstances... The FIA have kindly agreed a dispensation."

Another scheduled news briefing with Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff, who worked closely with non-executive chairman Lauda, was postponed until today.

Hamilton's Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas took Hamilton's place at the news conference.

"It meant a lot to me, but also to every single team member," said the Finn, when asked to reflect on Lauda's death.

"Niki was a big part of the Mercedes family. He was a massive motivation for myself as a driver for everything he achieved and the difficult career he had – with the comeback."

"It is not nice in terms of a mind-set for the team, but I am sure we can respect Niki by going flat out on track and getting a good result this weekend."



Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton rides a motorbike ahead of the Monaco Grand Prix yesterday.

Verstappen said: "Niki was a legend of the sport. He achieved a lot in his career, but also after his career had finished – he was generous and funny. He was a great guy and it is a big loss to Formula One."

Hamilton had earlier posted messages expressing his feelings on social media.

"My buddy, I'm struggling to believe you are gone," said Hamilton. "I will miss our conversations, our laughs, the big hugs after winning races together."

"It's truly been an honour working alongside you over these past seven years. I wouldn't have been in this team if it wasn't for you..."

Lauda's death, following long-term health problems, will cast a shadow across a racing occasion known for glamorous parties, fabulous boats and celebrity visitors as major sponsors jockey for attention and deals.

But it is unlikely to affect the on-track concentration of the drivers, especially at Mercedes where his passing will be most keenly felt, as Hamilton bids to add another Monaco win to those in 2008 and 2016 – and register a triumphant tribute to the great three-time world champion Austrian.

NBA

Raptors thump Bucks to level East finals at 2-2

The winner of the series will take on two-time defending champions Golden State Warriors

AFP
Los Angeles

The Toronto Raptors closed ranks around hurting star Kawhi Leonard, turning in a total team effort in a 120-102 victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Tuesday to level the NBA Eastern Conference finals. Kyle Lowry led the Raptors with 25 points and Toronto's bench out-scored Milwaukee's 48-23 as the Raptors followed up their double-overtime triumph in game three with a second straight home win.

They knotted the best-of-seven series at 2-2 with game five in Milwaukee today. The winner of the series will take on two-time defending champions Golden State, who completed a Western Conference finals sweep of Portland to reach their fifth straight NBA Finals.

Leonard, who downplayed suggestions he was injured after the gritty game-three victory, looked hobbled at times — wincing noticeably after dunking on Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo in the third quarter. Leonard grabbed a pass from Spanish big man Marc Gasol and drove for the basket, Antetokounmpo's move to stop him coming too late.

Leonard landed hard and held his left leg — although he would play on. "I think he's fine," Toronto coach Nick Nurse said. "He's logged a lot of minutes. He's certainly tired, like a lot of guys in this series are. He looks OK to me. I think there's a lot of guys out there that aren't 100% — on both sides of the ball."

But Lowry said Raptors "understood" that Leonard wasn't going to be 100% and knew going into the contest that "everybody has to step up and stay focused on the game plan."

Lowry scored 18 points in the first half as the Raptors came

back from an early seven-point deficit to lead 32-31 after one quarter — pushing the lead to 65-55 at halftime. Norman Powell added 18 points off the bench.

Serge Ibaka and Gasol scored 17 apiece, Ibaka also pulling down 13 rebounds. Fred VanVleet chipped in 13 points. VanVleet, who missed 16 of 20 shot attempts in the first three games of the series, connected on five of six from the field, draining all three of his three-point attempts.

"I think the first two games they really brought the intensity to us. They came out and were more physical were more active," Powell said. "We wanted to change that narrative and protect home court. We wanted to come out with a lot of juice, be more aggressive, be more physical and take the game to them. I think we really did that."

Toronto extended their lead to as many as 16 points in the third period and led by 13 going into the final frame. Khris Middleton led the Bucks with 30 points, six rebounds and seven assists. Milwaukee's Most Valuable Player finalist Antetokounmpo added 25 points and 10 rebounds, and Nikola Mirotic scored 11. But the Bucks lost their second straight game, something they did just once during the regular season.

Two home wins gave the Raptors some breathing room as they head back to Milwaukee, but Lowry said they'd done nothing more than hold serve. "They did what they did at home and we did what we're supposed to do at home," he said. "Our back's against the wall still." Lowry added. "We're going into a hostile environment. They're going to be ready to go."

Antetokounmpo said there was no feeling of panic among the Bucks. "The feeling is not any different," he said. "We've still got to get better, stick with our game plan. (We've) just got to play with more energy."



Kawhi Leonard (centre) of Toronto Raptors dunks the ball during the match against Milwaukee Bucks in game four of the NBA Eastern Conference Finals in Toronto, Canada on Tuesday. (AFP)

Warriors welcome extended break

Los Angeles: Pausing to reflect on their historic fifth consecutive Finals appearance should be an easy task for the Warriors. After Golden State put away the Portland Trail Blazers in a 4-0 sweep of the Western Conference finals on Monday, Golden State kicked off an extended idle hour.

With the Eastern Conference finals scheduled through May 27, Game 1 of the NBA Finals is May 30 at either Milwaukee or Toronto. The Bucks lost to the Raptors on Tuesday and head back to Milwaukee with the series tied 2-2. "Get outside," Warriors All-Star Klay Thompson said of his plans for the nine-day hiatus. "Hopefully it's good weather in the Bay finally. Just enjoy — just enjoy the downtime, because the NBA Finals, having experience with it, it's such an emotional roller coaster, that it's nice to get away from the game a little bit before it starts because emotions run high, and it takes a lot out of you."

Timing couldn't be more clutch for Steve Kerr's team, a pause in the chase for a fourth Larry O'Brien Trophy in five tries. The Warriors' next game will be No. 99 since beating the Oklahoma City Thunder in the regular-season opener on October 16. Playing down two starters, the Warriors are optimistic the R-and-R window will be plentiful enough for rest, relaxation and returns — of forward Kevin Durant and center DeMarcus Cousins. Durant missed the past five games with a calf strain and could resume on-court activities at the end of the week.

Cousins hasn't played since the opening series of the playoffs because of a quadriceps injury. Andre Iguodala did not play in Game 4, but is pegged to be back on the court any day and a "sure thing" for the Finals.

Curry roasted the Blazers on the heels of an MVP-type performance in the closeout game to eliminate the Houston Rockets. He has scored 30-plus points in five consecutive games, an epic run that piggybacks similar output by Durant for the first two rounds of the playoffs.

Curry called Monday night a "special moment" to walk off the court with another fancy hat and a ticket to the Finals.

NHL

Blues reach first Stanley Cup final since 1970

Reuters
St. Louis

The worst team in the entire NHL a few days into the new year completed an astounding turnaround on Tuesday as the St. Louis Blues advanced to the Stanley Cup Final for the first time since 1970.

The club that fired its coach in November and sat dead last in the NHL when the sun rose on Jan. 3 dispatched the San Jose Sharks in a six-game Western Conference finals, capped by a 5-1 home-ice victory on Tuesday. The Blues will meet the Boston Bruins in the championship round.

"A lot of us felt we were in games and close and couldn't find a way to win them," St. Louis captain Alex Pietrangolo said. "We had some good honest conversations and knew we had to be better. We looked each other in the eye, and we did it."

The Blues dominated the undermanned Sharks in the clincher. They now will open the Stanley Cup Final on Monday in Boston, facing the same team they met the last time they went this far. That series was memorialised by Bobby Orr's winning overtime goal for Boston that he celebrated by going airborne.

David Perron collected a goal and an assist Tuesday, and Ryan O'Reilly posted three assists in the victory. "It was a special moment for all of us," said Blues rookie goalie Jordan Binnington, who stopped 25 shots. "We're excited and looking forward to the next round."

The Sharks, who are potentially facing major turnover before next season, were wound up a trio of key players. Forwards Joe Pavelski and Tomas Hertl were injured in Game 5, while defenseman Erik Karlsson was sidelined due to an apparent groin injury, and the hosts took advantage.

Perron opened the scoring just 92 seconds into the clash and Vladimir Tarasenko netted a power-play goal with 3:44 remaining in the opening frame to stake St. Louis to a 2-0 lead. Dylan Gambrell — who drew into the San Jose line-up due to the injuries — scored his first NHL goal at the 6:40 mark of the second period to put the Sharks on the board and give them life. However, St. Louis' Brayden Schenn quashed those hopes six minutes later when he buried a rebound



St. Louis Blues players celebrate after their win over the San Jose Sharks in game six of the Western Conference Final of the 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs in St. Louis, USA on Tuesday. (USA TODAY Sports)

for the power-play goal that snapped his goal drought at 13 games. Tyler Bozak and Ivan Barbashev iced the game with third-period goals. St. Louis won the last three games in the series, all coming after their controversial Game 3 overtime loss in which the winning goal was scored despite an obvious hand pass.

That game appeared to galvanize the Blues, even if they outwardly shrugged it off at the time. "My feeling was if we're

going to win the next game, we were going to win the series because we took that road," Perron said. "I'm glad we approached it that way."

The Blues outscored the Sharks 12-2 in the final three games. "Their team is a hard team. I think the two hardest, heaviest teams are in the final," Sharks coach Pete DeBoer said. "Everyone talks about skill and all the small players, and there is room for that, but I don't think it's an

accident. They're heavy, hard and organized. There wasn't any room out there."

Certainly not any room for a Sharks comeback. "I was proud of our group tonight," DeBoer added. "I don't think the score reflected the work we put in. I know what the scoreboard said at the end of the night, but I felt we made them earn it. We showed up in tough circumstances and got efforts from everybody. That's all you can ask."

FOCUS

Trail Blazers extend Stotts' contract

AFP
Los Angeles

Portland Trail Blazers head coach Terry Stotts has agreed a new multi-year contract extension in the wake of the team's NBA playoff exit to the Golden State Warriors, the team said yesterday. Blazers president of basketball operations Neil Olshey confirmed a new contract had been signed but gave no further details.

Olshey said Stotts' winning record had prompted the club to lock in the coach for the long-term. "We win every year," Olshey said. "But it goes beyond just wins and losses. It's alignment. It's partnership. It's knowing the organisation is moving forward. It's a commitment to a longer-term view that there are priorities beyond just the next game."

Stotts meanwhile told reporters that he was happy to be remaining with the team. "Obviously, I'm pleased," Stotts said. "I'm pleased that we came to an agreement. I'm very happy here, I'm happy with the team. This year was probably the most enjoyable year as a head coach, as far as the group of guys we had."

Stotts, 61, joined the Blazers as head coach in 2012. This year he led the team to their first Western Conference finals appearance since 2000. The Blazers were eliminated from the playoffs however on Monday, as the Golden State Warriors completed a clean sweep.

Meanwhile, Trail Blazers and All-Star guard Damian Lillard are expected to agree to a four-year, \$191m supermax contract extension. Lillard, 28, has two years and approximately \$62m left on the five-year, \$120m extension he signed in July 2015.



Lillard averaged 25.8 points, a career-high 6.9 assists and 4.6 rebounds in 80 games this season. He broke his own Portland record by making 237 3-pointers.

The four-time All-Star would qualify for a supermax deal if he is voted to one of the three All-NBA teams.

He made the first team in 2017-18, the second team in 2015-16 and the third in 2013-14.

DONCIC AND YOUNG IN NBA ALL-ROOKIE FIRST TEAM
Dallas Mavericks swingman Luka Doncic and Atlanta Hawks point guard Trae Young were unanimous selections to the 2018-19 NBA All-Rookie first team. Joining them on the first team were Phoenix Suns center Deandre Ayton, Memphis Grizzlies forward Jaren Jackson Jr. and Sacramento Kings forward Marvin Bagley III.

It's the first time since 1984-85 that the top five picks in the draft made the first team. That season, Hakeem Olajuwon, Sam Bowie, Michael Jordan, Sam Perkins and Charles Barkley were honored. Making up the All-Rookie second team were Los Angeles Clippers guards Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Landry Shamet, Cleveland Cavaliers guard Collin Sexton, New York Knicks center Mitchell Robinson, and Hawks guard Kevin Huerter.

MLB

Verlander strikes out 12 as Astros defeat White Sox

Houston Astros' Yuli Gurriel hit a solo homer, and Michael Brantley had a two-run double

Reuters
Houston

Justin Verlander carried a no-hitter into the seventh inning, and Michael Brantley keyed a four-run uprising in the fifth with an opposite-field double to left as the Houston Astros claimed a 5-1 victory over the visiting Chicago White Sox on Tuesday.

Verlander (8-1) flirted with his third career no-hitter, dominating the White Sox with a season-high 12 strikeouts while allowing just one baserunner entering the top of the seventh. After Verlander recorded his 11th strikeout to open that frame, he lost his no-hitter and shutout when Jose Abreu drilled a first-pitch fastball for a homer to straightaway center field. Verlander gave up one run, one hit and one walk in eight innings. Houston's Yuli Gurriel hit a solo homer, and Michael Brantley had a two-run double.

METS 6, NATIONALS 5

Amed Rosario legged out the game-winning RBI infield single with two outs in the ninth inning as host New York capped a wild final few innings by edging Washington. Pinch hitter Adeiny Hechavarria began the game-winning rally by drawing a one-out walk against Tanner Rainey (0-1). JD Davis, whose three-run homer in the seventh gave the Mets a brief lead, followed by working a full-count walk.

Kyle Barraclough got Jeff McNeil to hit a grounder that forced Davis at second before Rosario grounded to shortstop and beat the throw from Trea Turner on a close play.

CUBS 3, PHILLIES 2

Javier Baez ripped a pinch-hit, walk-off single in the bottom of the ninth inning to lift Chicago to a win over visiting Philadelphia. Before the game, Cubs manager Joe Maddon said Baez would be held out for the second consecutive day due to an injured heel and would undergo an MRI exam.

However, after more than 3 1/2 hours on the bench, Baez delivered in the game's most critical moment.

Albert Almora Jr. also had an RBI during a two-run ninth for Chicago.

The Cubs bounced back after Andrew McCutchen ripped a two-out, two-run single in the seventh inning to put the Phillies ahead 2-1. Philadelphia's four-game winning streak ended.

YANKEES 11, ORIOLES 4

Clint Frazier homered twice and drove in five runs, and Gary Sanchez hit a three-run homer for the second straight night as New York prevailed at Baltimore. Frazier hit a two-run homer and a three-run shot.

Sanchez belted his three-run homer in the first — after hitting a tiebreaking three-run homer in the ninth inning that gave New York a 10-7 victory on Monday night. The Yankees posted their 12th victory in 15 games.



New York Mets shortstop Amed Rosario hits an RBI single in the ninth inning against the Washington Nationals in New York on Tuesday. (USA TODAY Sports)

The Orioles have now allowed 100 home runs in just 48 games to set a dubious record. The 2000 Kansas City Royals (57 games) were the previous fastest team to serve up 100.

GIANTS 4, BRAVES 3

Joe Panik capped a three-run ninth inning with a two-out, two-strike, two-RBI single, rallying San Francisco to a win over visiting Atlanta. After Julio Teheran had made his fourth straight solid start, the Braves took a 3-1 lead into the last of the ninth.

Atlanta got within one out of a win before Kevin Pillar stroked a single to score Brandon Crawford, getting the Giants within one. After Pillar stole second and took third on Pablo Sandoval's pinch-hit, infield single, Mac Williamson pinch-ran for Sandoval and also stole second, putting the potential tying and winning runs in scoring position.

That's when Panik, with a full count, poked a pitch from Luke Jackson (2-1) into right field, easily scoring the two baserunners for the walk-off win.

A'S 5, INDIANS 3

Mark Canha belted a two-run homer among his two hits in place of injured slugger Khris Davis, lifting visiting Oakland past Cleveland. Jurickson Profar hit his second homer in as many games, and Matt Chapman ripped an RBI double for the Athletics, who have won a season-high five in a row.

Francisco Lindor launched his 14th career leadoff homer, and Carlos Santana went deep for the third time in four contests for the Indians, who have lost four of five versus Oakland this season. Davis' return to the Athletics' lineup didn't last long as he was lifted in the third inning, with pinch hitter Canha going deep. Davis is dealing with the lingering effects of the left hip contusion he sustained after running into a wall at PNC Park in Pittsburgh on May 5, and he is headed to the injured list.

TWINS 8, ANGELS 3

Minnesota started slowly but put together big innings late in the game to rally past Los Angeles. Angels starting

pitcher Trevor Cahill held the Twins hitless until the fifth inning before the Minnesota offense got rolling with three runs in the sixth and four more in the seventh, primarily against the Los Angeles bullpen.

Minnesota got a big boost from the top of the lineup, as the first four hitters — Max Kepler, Jorge Polanco, Marwin Gonzalez and Eddie Rosario — combined for eight hits, six runs and seven RBIs to lead the Twins to their seventh victory in their past eight games.

PADRES 3, DIAMONDBACKS 2

Eric Hosmer capped a three-run sixth inning with a two-run, two-out opposite-field homer off Zack Greinke to give San Diego a victory over visiting Arizona. Arizona built a 2-0 lead against Padres starter Matt Strahm on solo homers by Eduardo Escobar (fourth inning) and John Ryan Murphy (fifth inning). Ian Kinsler started San Diego's sixth-inning rally with a one-out single to left, and he moved to second when Reyes grounded out to Greinke up the first base line.

Manny Machado drove in Kinsler with a single to center. Hosmer then drove Greinke's next pitch high to left, the drive just clearing the leap of Blake Swihart at the wall.

ROCKIES 5, PIRATES 0

German Marquez gave up three hits over eight shutout innings and added an RBI single as Colorado ended a four-game losing streak by winning at Pittsburgh. Marquez (5-2) walked one and struck out seven.

Carlos Estevez stranded two runners in the ninth to complete the shutout. Charlie Blackmon (3-for-5 with a two-run triple) and Trevor Story (solo home run) led the Colorado offense.

Pirates starter Chris Archer (1-4) went five innings, giving up four runs (three earned) on six hits with two walks and three strikeouts.

RANGERS 5, MARINERS 3

Lance Lynn struck out a season-high 11 in seven strong innings as Texas defeated Seattle in Arlington, Texas. Joey Gallo hit a two-run homer, and Nomar

Mazara went 3-for-4 with two doubles for the Rangers, who won their second straight game in the series and third in a row overall.

Lynn (6-3) allowed two runs on five hits and a walk to defeat Seattle for the second time this season. Shawn Kelley earned his third save of the season despite giving up a solo home run to Omar Narvaez with two outs in the ninth.

DODGERS 7, RAYS 3

Clayton Kershaw took a shutout into the seventh inning, and Joc Pederson drove in two runs as Los Angeles earned an interleague victory against Tampa Bay in St. Petersburg, Florida. In his first career appearance at Tropicana Field, Kershaw (4-0) struck out eight, walked one and gave up six hits in 6 1/3 innings.

The Dodgers improved to 7-0 in his starts this season and have won 15 consecutive times he has taken the mound going back to last season. Joc Pederson had two hits and two RBIs for the Dodgers. Tampa Bay's Austin Meadows went 2-for-5 and drove in a run.

REDS 3, BREWERS 0

Sonny Gray threw six strong innings to earn his first win with the Reds as Cincinnati won at Milwaukee. Gray (1-4) allowed five hits, struck out nine and walked four. The Brewers put their leadoff batter on base in three of the six innings against Gray but went 0-for-6 with runners in scoring position in that span.

David Hernandez, Amir Garrett and Raisel Iglesias each threw an inning of scoreless relief for Cincinnati, with Iglesias earning his 10th save.

MARLINS 5, TIGERS 4 (11 INNINGS)

Chad Wallach doubled home the go-ahead run in the 11th inning as visiting Miami extended its winning streak to four games by downing Detroit.

Brian Anderson homered and drove in two runs for the Marlins, who gave away a 4-2 lead in the ninth.

Nick Anderson (1-1) racked up five strikeouts in two scoreless innings while picking up his first major league victory.

Tigers manager Ron Gardenhire was ejected in the ninth inning for arguing an overturned call, and his team lost its seventh game in a row.

BLUE JAYS 10, RED SOX 3

Rookie Rowdy Tellez homered twice and drove in five runs as Toronto ended Boston's three-game road winning streak. Tellez belted a towering, two-run homer to right field in the fourth inning off Eduardo Rodriguez, which was quickly followed by a solo shot from Randal Grichuk in the next at-bat.

The Blue Jays then parked a three-run homer to right in the fifth to give Toronto a 6-0 lead. It was the first multi-homer performance in 64 career games for Tellez, who has eight home runs and 24 RBIs this season. Ninth-place hitter Brandon Drury had two hits with three RBIs for the Blue Jays.

SWIMMING

Olympic champ Meilutyte retires at 22 after missing doping tests

AFP
Vilnius, Lithuania

Lithuanian swimmer Ruta Meilutyte announced her retirement yesterday at the age of 22 after missing three doping tests, ending a career in which she became Olympic and world champion.

Lithuania's swimming federation said earlier this month that Meilutyte faced a suspension of up to two years for missing three drug tests, meaning she would be ruled out of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. "The swimmer took full responsibility for missing all tests," the federation said, adding that Meilutyte had failed to properly inform international anti-doping authorities about her whereabouts. Lithuania's anti-doping chief Kristina Jagminiene described it as an "unfortunate mistake".

Meilutyte, who has never failed a doping test, was a star of the 2012 London Games, where as a 15-year-old she won the 100 metres breaststroke event. She also won the gold at the world championships in Barcelona a year later. "I am ready to start a



Lithuania's Ruta Meilutyte was a star of the 2012 London Games, where as a 15-year-old she won the 100 metres breaststroke event.

new chapter of my life. Thank you all who supported me on this road", she said in a statement.

Meilutyte said she wanted to return to her studies and "experience simple things, to grow, to better understand myself and the world". Last year, Meilutyte admitted she was suffering from

depression. During her swimming career, she won 20 gold medals in top international competitions, according to Lithuania's swimming federation. Her last event was the World Championships in China last December where she failed to qualify for the finals.

ATHLETICS

Olympic marathon silver medallist Kirwa of Bahrain suspended for doping

Reuters
Paris

Bahrain's Olympic women's marathon silver medallist Eunice Kirwa has been provisionally suspended after failing a doping test, the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) said in a statement. Kenyan-born Kirwa, who switched allegiance to Bahrain in 2013 and finished second at the Rio Olympics in 2016, tested positive for erythropoietin (EPO), a banned blood-boosting hormone that improves endurance.

"The AIU confirms (a) provisional suspension against... Bahraini long-distance runner Eunice Jepkirui Kirwa... for a violation of the IAAF's (International Association of Athletics Federations') Anti-Doping Rules," AIU said in a statement.

Kirwa becomes the second women's marathon podium finisher at Rio to test positive for the same substance after Kenyan gold medallist Jemima Sumgong, who was suspended for four years by her country's anti-doping agency (ADAK) in



2017. Sumgong's ban was doubled to eight years by the AIU after the IAAF found her guilty of providing false information while defending herself against the initial sanction but was allowed to keep her gold medal as she tested positive in April 2017.

FORMER KENYA ATHLETICS CHIEF BANNED 10 YEARS FOR CORRUPTION
Kenya's former athletics team manager Michael Rotich has been banned for 10 years for agreeing to provide advance notice to athletes of doping tests in

exchange for money, the IAAF announced yesterday. Rotich was exposed by two undercover journalists from the *Sunday Times* in an article published in August 2016 and was sent home in disgrace from the Olympic Games in Rio which were under way at the time.

He was also provisionally banned by the IAAF from his coaching job. In a statement an IAAF's Ethics Board panel said Rotich had offered to warn athletes of impending tests so they could flush doping substances from their system in order to

circumvent tests.

He also offered to provide excuses which athletes could use to avoid being penalised for missing tests. "The panel reiterates that the charges which it has found to be established are serious," the statement said.

"The conduct of Major Rotich was dishonest and corrupt. He sought to undermine anti-doping controls and to obtain a personal financial benefit in doing so."

The two *Sunday Times* journalists posing as the sports manager and coach of a fictional British athletics team met Rotich three times in early 2016, according to the Ethics panel. They were promised advance warning of doping tests in return for £10,000 (\$12,600, 11,300 euros).

The statement said that it had found no evidence that Rotich did in fact provide advance notice of doping tests nor that he had ever received payments. However the panel has found that Major Rotich acted corruptly and in deliberate violation of core principles of the Code (of Ethics), it said.

SPOTLIGHT

Kroos and Ter Stegen out of German squad

Neuer is included despite missing last six weeks with calf strain



In this March 22, 2018, picture, goalkeeper Marc-Andre Ter Stegen (right) and midfielder Toni Kroos attend a press conference on the eve of an international friendly. (AFP)

DPA
Munich

A strong second half to the season was not enough to earn World Cup winner Mario Goetze his place back in the Germany squad for coming Euro 2020 qualifiers, coach Joachim Loew revealed yesterday.

Dortmund forward Goetze missed out on the squad for the matches away to Belarus and at home to Estonia next month. Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen and Real Madrid midfielder Toni Kroos also miss out with injuries.

Bayern Munich captain Manuel Neuer is included despite missing the last six weeks

with a calf strain while keeper Bernd Leno, midfielder Julian Draxler and defender Jonas Hector were all recalled.

Loew will gather his squad from June 2 for a training camp in the Netherlands before heading to Minsk for the opening contest six days later. Mainz then hosts the Estonia game on June 11.

After starting Group C with a 3-2 win over the Netherlands, Loew has demanded six points from the minnows in the coming matches which will not signal the end of the season for two his squad.

Defensive duo Jonathan Tah and Lukas Klostermann will then join up with the under-21 squad for their age group European Championships in San

Marino, June 16-30. Germany are defending the title won two years ago in Poland.

"We're happy that we can count on Jona and Lukas for the Euros," U21 coach Stefan Kuntz said. "They are both captains and absolute leaders on and off the pitch."

In contrast Paris Saint-Germain defender Thilo Kehrer, Bayer Leverkusen duo Julian Brandt and Kai Havertz, Manchester City's treble winning Leroy Sane and RB Leipzig's Timo Werner will not join the U21s even though they would have been eligible to play.

SQUAD: Goalkeepers: Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich), Bernd Leno (Arsenal), Kevin Trapp (Eintracht Frankfurt)

Defenders: Matthias Ginter (Borussia Moenchengladbach), Marcel Halstenberg (RB Leipzig), Thilo Kehrer (Paris Saint-Germain), Lukas Klostermann (RB Leipzig), Jonas Hector (Cologne), Nico Schulz (Borussia Dortmund), Niklas Stark (Hertha Berlin), Niklas Sule (Bayern Munich), Jonathan Tah (Bayer Leverkusen)

Midfielders/Forwards: Julian Brandt (Bayer Leverkusen), Julian Draxler (Paris Saint-Germain), Serge Gnabry (Bayern Munich), Leon Goretzka (Bayern Munich), Ilkay Guendogan (Manchester City), Kai Havertz (Bayer Leverkusen), Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich), Marco Reus (Borussia Dortmund), Leroy Sane (Manchester City), Timo Werner (RB Leipzig)

FOCUS

Sterling wants to meet FA, league about racism

Reuters
New York

Manchester City forward Raheem Sterling, who is leading the fight against racism in soccer, said on Tuesday he hoped to talk to officials at England's Football Association and the Premier League about combating the menace.

Sterling told a conference in New York that the hectic nature of a footballer's schedule was the only thing that had kept him from meeting them already.

"In football you can get caught up with training every day and games every two, three days so you don't really have a lot of time to be out and speaking to people," Sterling said during a moderated discussion at the *Wall Street Journal's* Future of Everything conference.

"But for sure on my off time and holidays if I can get around and speak to the FA and the people in the Premier league and see how we can go about doing things better in the future for sure I'll be there in person to try and do that."

Sterling, named Footballer of the Year by the Football Writers' Association last month, scored two goals on Saturday as City crushed Watford 6-0 to become the first team to win the English domestic treble of league championship and both domestic cups on Saturday.

He re-iterated his hope to see clubs slapped with automatic nine-point deductions if their supporters indulged in racist behaviour.

"If I go to a football game and I support Manchester United, for example, I don't want to be the person that lets my team down by saying silly remarks in a stadium," said Sterling.

"If you know your team is going to get deducted nine points from them winning the league you are not going to say these racist remarks even though you shouldn't have it in your head."

Last season, Sterling accused sections of the British media of fuelling racism with negative portrayals of young black players.

Sterling also encountered racist abuse during England's Euro 2020 qualifier in Montenegro in March, while there have been many other cases in European soccer in recent months.

Despite that, Sterling felt there had been some encouraging signs with regard to fan behaviour.

"Ten years ago it was a lot, lot worse than it is now. It's starting to get better and people are understanding that they can't say certain things," he said.

"But I think it's partly English culture on a Saturday to go out early and get ready for the game and start drinking. So a lot of these people are kind of drunk by the time they get (to the stadium). But it's getting lot better than it used to be."



Manchester City's Raheem Sterling takes part in Premier League victory celebrations on Monday. (Reuters)

Rudi Garcia to quit as Marseille coach

Rudi Garcia will step down as Marseille coach following this weekend's final round of Ligue 1 matches after the French giants failed to qualify for European football next season. "I've decided to leave. I put forth this solution to my president who accepted it," Garcia said at a press conference yesterday, sat alongside Marseille chief Jacques-Henri Eyraud. The 55-year-old Garcia was appointed coach in October 2016 with the mandate of leading Marseille back into the Champions League, shortly after the club's takeover by American tycoon Frank McCourt. He extended his deal last October until 2021, but Garcia will leave the Velodrome with two years remaining on his contract after missing out on a top-three finish. "Rudi is a great coach and a man of great quality," said Eyraud, who dismissed reports of an eight-figure payout for Garcia and his assistants.

Gyan backtracks on retirement ahead of African Cup

Ghana national team captain Asamoah Gyan yesterday reversed his decision to retire from international football, just weeks before the Africa Cup of Nations. The striker said Monday he was quitting the national team after he was angered by coach Kwasi Appiah's plan to strip him of the captaincy for next month's finals in Egypt. But President Nana Akufo-Addo intervened on Tuesday by telephoning the Turkey-based player, urging him to make himself available for selection. Gyan in a statement said he has accepted the president's request, and was ready for the tournament. "A presidential request is one that cannot be disregarded... I have taken the request of His Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo in good faith, and will make myself available for selection by coach Kwasi Appiah," the 33-year-old forward said in a statement. "My desire to help Ghana end the over three-decade long wait to annex the AFCON trophy still burns strong, and I remain committed to serving this great nation and the people of Ghana," he added.

Hughton 'hugely disappointed' by Brighton sacking

Chris Hughton admits he was "hugely disappointed and surprised" to be sacked by Brighton. Hughton was axed despite keeping the club in the Premier League and leading them to the FA Cup semi-finals. The 60-year-old's surprise dismissal came just one day after Brighton's final game of a season in which they finished 17th, two points ahead of third-bottom Cardiff. "I was hugely disappointed and surprised by the decision that was made to end my time with Brighton and Hove Albion FC," Hughton said in a statement released by the League Managers Association yesterday. "I thoroughly enjoyed my four and a half years managing this special football club. I would like to put on record my gratitude to my coaching staff, the players, fans, everyone connected to the club and the wider community of Brighton & Hove and wish them luck for the future."

Caparros to step down as Sevilla coach

Sevilla's Joaquin Caparros is stepping down as manager but will stay on as part of the technical staff, the Liga club said in a statement yesterday. The 64-year-old, appointed for a third spell in March following Pablo Machin's sacking, met club President Jose Castro and Sporting Director Monchi during Sevilla's post-season tour of Tanzania where the decision was reached by all parties. "From the 1919/20 season, the current coach will take up a prominent role in the sporting direction of Sevilla, which is headed up by Monchi," read a club statement. The club did not give any details on a replacement. Caparros has been in charge of the five-time Europa League winners for 167 games and led the club to a sixth-place finish in La Liga this season and Europa League qualification. They missed out on a Champions League spot by two points after losing two of their last three games of the campaign. Caparros said last month that he had been diagnosed with leukaemia but vowed to continue in his job.

VAR success in La Liga, say Spanish referees

The Spanish Referee's Committee (CTA) has said Video Assistant Refereeing (VAR) in La Liga has helped in all aspects of the game after their first season with the new system. VAR checked 4,293 actions — an average of 12 per match — in the 380-game La Liga season, intervening a total of 121 times (3.14 per game) and leading to 114 changed decisions. This included the awarding of seven red cards that on-field officials missed, with 60 goals awarded by video technology. The CTA also said player protests were down 17.3 percent, while simulation dropped by 68% following the introduction of VAR. "Our officials have adapted very well to the changes, but so have the fans and media, too. It's like we've always played with VAR," said CTA president Carlos Velasco Carballo.

COMMENT

US '99 World Cup win should have done more for women's game: Foudy

Reuters
Toronto

The United States' World Cup triumph on home soil in 1999 was a watershed moment for the sport but midfielder Julie Foudy had hoped it would help the women's game grow at a much faster pace.

The third edition of the tournament was held in the US in massive stadiums for the first time and new heights were reached for attendance, media coverage and television audiences.

"It was a chance for us to show the United States and the world what a women's sporting event should look like," Foudy, who went on to become US captain from 2000 to 2004, told Reuters in a telephone interview.

"We knew that there was still a resistance to supporting young girls playing sports and participating in sports so if we could give an example of why it's so important then we wanted to run with that opportunity."

The US beat China 5-4 on penalties in the final, which was goalless after extra time, in searing temperatures in

front of more than 90,185 fans at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California — still a record attendance for a women's soccer game.

That 1999 victory captivated the nation and was supposed to serve as a lift-off point to a bright future of professional women's soccer leagues, greater exposure and generally more of everything for women across the entire sports spectrum.

While progress was made over the next 20 years, gaps remain, including one that convinced the current US team to sue the US Soccer Federation for gender discrimination in the lead-up to their World Cup defence in France next month.

The 48-year-old Foudy, twice a World Cup winner and Olympic gold medalist who is currently a writer and commentator for ESPN, said she was beyond surprised that in this day and age there was even a need for such a dispute.

"And frustrated. And tired," she added. "It's exhausting to keep fighting that fight and especially (for them) to do it right before a World Cup to launch that battle, but it meant that much to them that they felt they needed to do it."

"But you look back and say, didn't we show 20 years ago



In this July 10, 1999, picture, Julie Foudy (centre) of the US holds up the FIFA Women's World Cup trophy after the win over China in the final in Pasadena, California. (Reuters)

that this (winning the World Cup) is something that has the potential to create a wonderful market for women's soccer."

'GOOD SIGN'
Foudy, who hosted a one-hour

ESPN special that aired last week called "The '99ers, Reunited" and featured five of her former teammates, said more countries had since stepped up their efforts to support the women's game and that will

be easy to see at next month's World Cup.

"It's the first (World Cup) where I've been able to count the number of potential winners on more than one hand, which is a good sign," said

Foudy, who predicts either the US or France will lift the trophy.

"There are countries out there who have put the money in and are investing and now they are seeing the returns of a potential World Cup-winning team. But it's been slow for sure."

Foudy said a number of countries have embraced the women's game since her team's 1999 triumph and pointed specifically to France and England, the latter having been wished good luck ahead of this year's tournament by Britain's Prince William.

But Foudy suggested other countries need to be pushed to support the women's game and she did not understand why any would hesitate to invest more for what she felt was a large return.

"You still get to this day countries that constantly say, 'oh my gosh, I am surprised by the reaction by my country to the women's game,'" said Foudy.

"It's like, when are we going to stop being surprised? When it really is the global game and it's simple things. It's low hanging fruit supporting girls playing and there's a large return (on a small investment). That's the thing that just gets me."

SPOTLIGHT

QFA president meets U20 players in Poland

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar Football Association (QFA) president Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani met with Qatar players currently getting ready for the FIFA U-20 World Cup in Poland on Monday.

The FIFA U-20 World Cup will be played in Poland from May 23 to June 15.

This will be the fourth time that Qatar, currently coached by Bruno Miguel, will feature in the tournament. Qatar finished run-

ners-up in the 1981 edition.

The QFA president urged the players to give their best as top teams in the world are competing in the event.

He underlined the importance of doing well at top FIFA events around the world. Qatar featured in the 2015 edition held in New Zealand. A number of players from the squad in New Zealand have graduated to the senior side.

Prior to arriving in Poland, the Qatar juniors underwent training camps in France and Slovakia.

Qatar are in Group D with Nigeria, Ukraine and the United States.

Qatar juniors face Nigeria on May 24, Ukraine on May 27 and the US on May 30.

SQUAD: Hammam al-Amin Ahmed, Abdullah Saaie, Salah Zakaria (Eupen), Shehab Mamdouh al-Leithi, Nasser Saleh al-Yazidi, Ahmed Sibai (Al Duhail), Nasser Abbas, Issa Ahmed, Khalid Mohamed and Yousef Ayman (Qatar), Abdulrahman Ibrahim, Marwan Sharif, Mohamed Wa'ed, Ahmed Suhail (Al Ahli), Hashim Ali and Yousuf Abdul Razak (Al Arabi), Andrea Siabutra (Al Gharafa), Bahaa Mamdouh al-Liithi (Al Sadd) and Ali Mal Allah (Al Wakrah). Coach: Bruno Miguel



FOCUS

Sarri to discuss Chelsea future after Europa final

Italian's style of football has not been universally embraced by Chelsea fans

AFP
London

Chelsea manager Maurizio Sarri plans showdown talks with the club's hierarchy after next week's Europa League final to see if they want the Italian to remain in charge next season.

Sarri's side recovered from a mid-season slump in time to secure Champions League football next season via a third-placed finish in the Premier League, and could end the season with a trophy when they face Arsenal in Baku on May 29.

However, Sarri's style of football has not been universally embraced by the Chelsea fans during his first season in charge and rumours in his homeland have linked the former Napoli boss with the vacant managerial roles at Juventus and Roma.

"I will speak to the club as I want to see if they are happy with me or not," said Sarri on Wednesday. "I have two more years on my contract."

The Milan stock exchange does not appear to share Chelsea fans' reservations. Juventus shares rose 5.60 per cent yesterday afternoon following reports in the Italian press the Italian champions had been in contact with Sarri.

Juventus are looking for a manager after parting last week with Massimiliano Allegri, who won the Italian title in each of



Chelsea manager Maurizio Sarri (right) talks to a player during a training session at the team's Training Centre in Cobham, England, yesterday. (Reuters)

his five seasons in charge. Juventus shares, which dipped below 0.60 euros last May before Cristiano Ronaldo arrived, reached 1.46 euros yesterday.

Sarri insisted any decision on his future should not be de-

pendent on the outcome of the Europa League final.

"If the situation is like this then I want to go immediately," he added. "Ten months of work and then I have to play everything in 90 minutes, that is

not right. You are either happy about my work or not happy?"

'GOOD TO WONDERFUL SEASON'

Sarri, though, defended his record after guaranteeing the

club's principal target for the campaign of a return to the Champions League and reaching two Cup finals.

"I think that we had a good season, with a lot of problems of course," he added.

"We finished third in the Premier League, final of League Cup, a very difficult competition, now we have the possibility to play the final of the Europa League.

"If we are able to win then it will become a wonderful season."

Arsenal's preparation for the final has been disrupted as midfielder Henrikh Mkhitaryan has decided not to travel on safety grounds due to political tensions between his native Armenia and hosts Azerbaijan.

Supporters from both clubs also face huge logistical issues and expense in trying to attend the final in a city nearly 2,500 miles from London.

And Sarri joined Arsenal's condemnation of selecting Baku as the host city for such a prestigious final.

"The location is a big problem for our fans. I think it was better to be in another location," he said.

On Mkhitaryan's decision not to travel, he added: "Really disappointed for the situation, I would like to see him on the pitch."

"In a decision like this you have to respect the decision of the man. Not of the player, of the man."

SELECTION

Messi and Aguero in Argentina Copa America squad

AFP
Buenos Aires

Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi and the returning Sergio Aguero headed the 23-man Copa America squad announced by Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni on Tuesday.

Paris Saint-Germain winger Angel Di Maria was also included but there was no place for striker Gonzalo Higuain, who is on loan at Chelsea from Juventus.

"These are the best players in an important time for the national team," said Scaloni ahead of the tournament hosted by Brazil, which begins on June 14.

Argentina will play in Group B alongside Colombia, Paraguay and guests Qatar, the 2022 World Cup hosts and current Asian champions.

Messi, who only returned to the Argentina squad in March after an eight-month absence following the World Cup in Russia, will turn 32 during the competition.

Di Maria, like Messi, made his post-World Cup return in March ahead of friendlies against Venezuela and Morocco, but Manchester City's Aguero had not been called up since Argentina's 4-3 last 16 defeat to eventual champions France in Russia.

Another high-profile omission was Inter Milan forward Mauro Icardi, who has been left out of the Italian team's line-up for the last two months over a dispute regarding a contract renewal.

"Keeping everyone happy is



difficult," admitted Scaloni, who said he'd had "doubts right until the end" over the final squad make-up.

Argentina have not won the Copa America, or any major international tournament, since 1993, losing in the final in four of the last five editions of the continental showpiece.

SQUAD:
Goalkeepers: Agustin Marchesin, Franco Armani, Esteban Andrada
Defenders: German Pezzela, Juan Foyth, Nicolas Otamendi, Nicolas Tagliacofe, Marcos Acuna, Renzo Saravia, Ramiro Funes Mori, Milton Casco
Midfielders: Leandro Paredes, Angel Di Maria, Guido Rodriguez, Giovanni Lo Celso, Roberto Pereyra, Rodrigo De Paul, Exequiel Palacios
Forwards: Lionel Messi, Sergio Aguero, Paulo Dybala, Lautaro Martinez, Matias Suarez

ASPIRATION

Eden Hazard is my Chelsea benchmark, says Pulisic

AFP
London

Christian Pulisic says he wants to make the same impact that Eden Hazard has had at Chelsea and hopes to play alongside the Belgium superstar at Stamford Bridge.

The US international signed a five-and-a-half year contract with Maurizio Sarri's team in January but was immediately loaned back to Germany to finish the season at Borussia Dortmund.

"It is incredible to see what Eden can do," Pulisic, 20, told the BBC. "He (Hazard) is a guy to look up to and what I would love to become."

"It is definitely a goal. Any player would be dumb not to want to be in the same team as him."

But the £58mn (\$73mn) signing appears unlikely to get his wish to play alongside Chelsea's star man, with Hazard persistently linked with a move to Real Madrid.

Pulisic, who scored four times in 20 league appearances last season for Dortmund, who finished as runners-up to Bayern Munich, said he wanted to inspire young American footballers.

"I don't want to be looked at as someone who is the youngest



to do this or that," said Pulisic, who is both the youngest player to captain the United States and to score for them in a World Cup qualifier.

"I just want to be an established player and someone people respect, who is successful in this league."

"It is completely new to me and something not a lot of American players have experienced." Pulisic spent part of his childhood in England and relished the football culture.

"I soon realised how much people over here loved the game. To be in that culture and get thrown right in just grew my passion even more," he said.

"Every day after school I was on the court playing."

"I would go to games with my dad, including one at Chelsea. I don't remember how old I was but it would have been around the time Jose Mourinho was there."

"The fans were screaming and yelling. The atmosphere was fantastic. I had never seen anything like it!"

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Ito double takes Kashima into knockouts

Reuters
Hong Kong

Kashima Antlers' Sho Ito scored a rapid-fire double to salvage their Asian Champions League title defence as the J-League side fought back to beat Shandong Luneng 2-1 yesterday and book their place in the last 16.

Five minutes after coming off the bench, Ito cancelled out Marouane Fellaini's early header and the 30-year-old striker put his side's qualification beyond doubt less than two minutes later when he showed composure to score the winner.

Kashima, who finished second in the group behind Shandong, had needed to avoid defeat to qualify for the next phase of the competition, ahead of Group E rivals Gyeongnam FC, of South Korea, and Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) from Malaysia.

The victory set up a round of 16 meeting with fellow J-League

side Sanfrecce Hiroshima next month.

Gyeongnam beat JDT 2-0 in the other game in Group E, but the three points were not enough for them to reach the next round after Kashima's victory left the South Koreans in third place.

"We lost our shape and our combinations after we conceded, so that is something we need to go over," said Kashima coach Go Otiwa.

"What matters today is that we advanced to the next round. I'm proud of us for coming from behind to win. But we do have a lot to work on for the next round."

Hiroshima had already secured first place in Group F and claimed a fifth straight victory with a comfortable 3-1 win over Melbourne Victory in what was Kevin Muscat's final game in charge of the Australian side.

Shandong will take on fellow Chinese Super League side Guangzhou Evergrande in the next phase of the competition after Fabio Cannavaro's side

edged past Daegu FC from South Korea with a 1-0 win to take second place in Group F.

In the west of the continent, Al Wahda of the United Arab Emirates secured top spot in Group B despite being held to a 1-1 draw by Saudi Arabia's Al Ittihad, who also advanced to the next round by finishing in second.

Neither side, however, knows who they will face in the round of 16 after the top-of-the-table clash in Group A between Iran's Zobahan and Al Nassr from Saudi Arabia — due to be played in a neutral venue in Karbala in Iraq — was postponed.

Both teams have booked their places in the round of 16, with Zobahan needing only a draw to finish in first place.

The Asian Football Confederation is yet to announce a date for the rescheduled fixture, with the round of 16 matches in the west to be played in August. Games between teams in the east will be played on June 18 and 25.



Kashima Antlers' Sho Ito (right) shoots to score during the AFC Champions League match against China's Shandong Luneng in Kashima, Japan, yesterday. (AFP)