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Warriors edge Raptors to keep title hopes alive



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Roord heads late Netherlands winner to beat New Zealand

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CRICKET

Dhawan injury in focus ahead of India's New Zealand clash

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FOOTBALL / COPA AMERICA

Hopeful Messi keen to end Argentina title drought

'I want to end my career having won something with the national team'

AFP
Rio de Janeiro

With Neymar sidelined by an ankle injury, Lionel Messi heads into the Copa America this weekend as the competition's main attraction but one with a desperate need to end more than a decade of hurt with Argentina.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner has one of the most impressive trophy hauls in football history but there is a glaring void when it comes to national team accolades.

Four Champions League crowns and 10 La Liga titles with Barcelona are not matched by Argentina success.

And the 31-year-old knows he's running out of time to rectify that anomaly.

"I want to end my career having won something with the national team, or at least try to do so as many times as possible," he told Fox Sports last week.

Four finals played with Argentina, four defeats, including the last two Copa finals on penalties against Chile.

But the most painful was the 2014 World Cup final to Germany at the iconic Maracana, where Messi will hope to return on July 7 for the Copa title decider.

That Germany defeat began a run of losing finals in three successive years and after the last of those, a bitterly disappointed Messi announced his international retirement.

He and his teammates came in for a torrent of abuse and criticism.

"People were attacking us from every side," he said.

His retirement lasted just six



In this June 7, 2019, picture, Argentina's Lionel Messi (second from left) and Sergio Aguero (right) celebrate after the international friendly against Nicaragua at the Bicentenario Stadium in San Juan, Argentina, (Reuters)

weeks, though, and it was his hat-trick in Argentina's final qualifier that secured a 3-1 win in Ecuador that sent the team to the World Cup in Russia last year.

But, as so many times before, Messi was unable to recapture his Barca form while on international duty and dejection followed as the albiceleste were sent home in the second round after a 4-3 defeat to eventual winners France.

But while Messi then missed Argentina's next six matches — all friendlies — there was no talk of retirement this time.

His son Thiago "loves it when I play for the national team," Messi told Fox.

But the disappointments have kept piling up despite a 10th La Liga crown secured in May.

'BEAUTIFUL CUP'

Messi had made no secret at the start of the season that winning the Champions League for the fifth time was his priority as he wanted to bring that "beautiful cup back to Camp Nou".

Things looked so good as Barca took a 3-0 advantage to Anfield for the semi-final second leg last month.

What happened next — an inspired Liverpool stormed to a 4-0 victory and 4-3 aggregate success — left as bitter a taste in Messi's mouth as had the Germany loss five years ago.

"To lose a final of the World Cup is the most important of all, it is a big disappointment," he said in May.

But he admitted that the Liverpool loss felt a bit worse "because we were winning and we didn't expect them to come back".

Messi has long been talisman for club and country but he will be even more so in Brazil with a rejuvenated squad full of inexperienced campaigners.

But that hasn't dampened expectation either within the group or the country as a whole.

"We're going there with the same hope and desire as ever. Argentina is going through a process of change with young

and new lads," he told TyC Sports last week.

"For most of them it's their first official tournament, but that won't stop Argentina trying to win the competition," he added.

It's 26 years since Argentina last won the Copa America, despite contesting four of the last five finals.

"It's been a long time since Argentina won it and we all want to celebrate again, us and the fans want a title."

None more so than Messi himself, who turns 32 on June 24, the day after Argentina's final group B game against invites and 2022 World Cup hosts Qatar, the reigning Asian champions.

FOCUS

Exhibition in Sao Paulo will showcase Qatar's preparations for FIFA World Cup



FIFA World Cup Qatar LLC CEO Nasser al-Khater.

Qatar will host a public exhibition at JK Iguatemi mall in Sao Paulo, Brazil, from June 14-24 to highlight the country's preparations for the FIFA World Cup.

The Journey to 2022 exhibition will be held on the third floor of the mall, which is located in the Vila Olimpia district of Sao Paulo. It will feature FIFA World Cup memorabilia, crowd-sourced photographs which highlight football culture in Qatar, models of the eight Qatar 2022 stadiums and details about Qatar's Asian Cup victory. Much of the memorabilia is the property of Qatari collector Mohamed Abdulatif and includes match-worn shirts, footballs, tickets and more.

Around 30 Brazil-based volunteers will support the delivery of the exhibition after signing up to support Qatar 2022-related events. The exhibition has been organised to coincide with Qatar's debut in the Copa America. The reigning Asian champions have been invited to take part in the tournament along with Japan. Qatar have been drawn in Group B alongside Argentina, Colombia and Paraguay. Their campaign gets underway when they face Paraguay in Rio on June 16.

In addition to the exhibition, Qatar is sending a delegation of ten people to shadow the 2019 Copa America Local Organising Committee. The delegation includes employees from the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC), Qatar Football Association, Qatar Stars League

and the Josoor Institute. The delegation will be based in Rio, Morumbi and Corinthians.

The SC, the organisation responsible for delivering the infrastructure required for the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar, is running the exhibition, which will be open every day from 10am-10pm.

FIFA World Cup Qatar LLC CEO Nasser al-Khater said Qatar's participation in the Copa America provided the perfect opportunity to engage with fans from across Latin America.

"We know that passion for football runs deep across South America and we are confident that thousands of fans from the region will travel to Qatar to enjoy the next instalment of the FIFA World Cup," said al-Khater.

"The exhibition at JK Iguatemi mall is an opportunity to share details of our preparations and give people a flavour of what they can expect in just over three years' time. We hope that people will enjoy the activation and take the opportunity to find out more about the first World Cup in the Arab world and only the second in Asia."

Al-Khater said hosting the World Cup was an opportunity for Qatar to build bridges between East and West and break down cultural stereotypes.

"For billions of people, 2022 will be the first time they engage with the Arab world. For us, it's a golden opportunity to shape people's perceptions about our country and region. Football will bring us all together." (SC.qa)

2019 ICC CRICKET WORLD CUP

Amir aims for another Taunton triumph as Australia await

AFP
Taunton, United Kingdom

Mohamed Amir will hope to enjoy another landmark occasion at Taunton when Pakistan face Australia there in a World Cup match today.

The group fixture at southwest county Somerset's headquarters sees Amir back at the ground where he made his return to first-class cricket in England three years ago.

Amir was the rising star of world cricket when his career came to a stunning halt during a Lord's Test in 2010 after both he and new-ball partner Mohamed Asif were caught bowling no-balls on the orders of then Pakistan captain Salman Butt as part of a newspaper sting operation.

The trio all received five-year bans from cricket and jail terms.

That same 2010 season had seen Amir produce a superb display of swing bowling in taking three for 20 as Pakistan dismissed Australia for just 88 on the first day of a 'neutral' Test at Headingley.

Those skills remained intact as Amir marked his 2016 return to the first-class game in England in 2016 with a haul of three for 36 against Somerset at Taunton.

All three wickets — including that of former England opener Marcus Trescothick — owed much to late swing.

The intervening years have not been easy for Amir, however, and he almost missed what is his first World Cup after taking just five wickets in 14 matches before a recent one-day international series in England.

Amir did not bowl in the washed-out first match against England and missed the last four games with chicken pox. England

won the series 4-0.

But having been left out of Pakistan's preliminary squad for the World Cup, the 27-year-old made it into the final 15.

His World Cup debut was a rare Pakistan highlight after they slumped to 105 all out against the West Indies, with Amir taking three for 26 in a seven-wicket loss at Trent Bridge.

He was in the wickets again at the Nottingham ground, but this time in a winning cause, with two for 67 as Pakistan surprisingly beat tournament favourites England by 14 runs last week.

But Pakistan's progress was checked by a total washout against Sri Lanka at Bristol.

'AGGRESSIVE APPROACH'

Pakistan have won just one of their last 14 matches against champions Australia, the five-times World Cup winners.

That victory was inspired by

Mohamed Hafeez's 72 at Melbourne in January 2017.

And it was Hafeez's 84 that laid the foundations for an impressive total of 348 for eight against England.

"We have not won many matches against Australia but we had not won too many against England either," said Pakistan captain Sarfaraz Ahmed.

"But we have finally beaten England and that has given us a lot of positives. We will go with the aggressive approach we showed against England."

The wicket-keeper expects to face an Australia side stung by a 36-run loss to India last weekend — their first defeat of this World Cup following wins over Afghanistan and the West Indies.

"We know Australia will try to come back and with (Steve) Smith and (David) Warner back they are at their best again," said Sarfaraz.

"We respect all our opponents and are ready for them."

WARNER WORRY

Australia will hope opener Warner, for all he has already scored two fifties this World Cup, is back to his destructive best at Taunton.

Warner's 56 off 84 balls against India — of which 48 were dots — helped contribute to a slow run rate that left Australia with too much to do at the end of their innings. The left-hander was also involved in the run-out of Australia captain and opening partner Aaron Finch.

But Finch backed Warner, who along with Smith is playing in his first major tournament for Australia since serving a year-long ban for ball-tampering.

"They (India) bowled very well to Warner and he needs some more time. He's a world-class player and will get us off to a flyer," said Finch.



FOCUS

Pakistan not hurting from rout by Australia: Sarfaraz

'Our morale is very high, we got a momentum. So hopefully we'll do very good against them tomorrow'



Agencies
Taunton, United Kingdom

Pakistan captain Sarfaraz Ahmed denied his team carry any scars from their 5-0 rout by Australia in March and is confident of victory in today's World Cup contest against the reigning champions.

Australia thrashed a depleted Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates follow their thrilling 3-2 series victory in India to signal their preparation for a successful title defence in the World Cup.

"I think that thing is past," Sarfaraz told reporters. "We're not thinking about that. We're actually thinking about tomorrow's game."

"Our morale is very high, we got a momentum. So hopefully



Pakistan's captain Sarfaraz Ahmed (also above) leaves after a press conference in Taunton, England, yesterday. (AFP)

we'll do very good against them tomorrow." The 1992 champions have

looked characteristically unpredictable in the tournament as they began their campaign

with a defeat by West Indies but bounced back in style shocking hosts England.

They split points with Sri Lanka after the match in Bristol was abandoned because of rain and the prospect of another washout looms large over their next outing.

"Firstly, we can't control the weather, you know... But definitely if the match is shortened, definitely plan changes," Sarfaraz added.

Australia's Marcus Stoinis has been ruled out of the match with a side strain and fellow all-rounder Mitchell Marsh has been flown over to England as back-up.

The five-time champions went down to India in Sunday's match at the Oval where Stoinis sustained the injury.

Asked if he thought Australia were vulnerable after the loss and injury to Stoinis, Sarfaraz said: "I'm not thinking about them, or what they are thinking at the moment... I'm thinking about my team. We'll make a good plan for them and hopefully we will do well as a team."

PAKISTAN FANS WON'T BOO SMITH

Sarfaraz insisted Pakistan fans won't boo shamed Australia star Steven Smith during today's match.

Pakistan fans are expected to make up a large chunk of the crowd in the west country and there are fears they might follow the example of the India supporters who jeered Smith at the Oval on Sunday.

But Pakistan captain Sarfaraz says his compatriots will not resort to such tactics.

"I don't think Pakistani people will do that," Sarfaraz told reporters yesterday. "Pakistani people love cricket, they love to support and they love the players."

A large number of Indian fans chanted "cheater" at Smith, who back in action following a year-long ban for his role in the ball-tampering scandal that rocked Australia during their tour of South Africa in 2018.

India captain Virat Kohli gestured in an effort to quiet the crowd and later apologised to Smith.

SPOTLIGHT

Finch hopes washouts don't harm Australia's World Cup

AFP
Taunton, United Kingdom

Australia captain Aaron Finch hopes the holders don't become the latest World Cup team to be derailed by bad weather.

Heavy rain has forced two no-results in the World Cup so far and Finch has been anxiously eyeing the forecast to see if Australia could be the next victims when they face Pakistan at Taunton today.

Pakistan's match against Sri Lanka was washed out on Friday before the clash between South Africa and the West Indies was abandoned after less than eight overs play on Monday.

There is rain predicted in the Taunton area today and Finch hopes the holders could play a role in who makes the semi-finals from the 10-team group stage.

"I think it (weather) might play a huge part in the next few days," Finch told reporters yesterday. "Next week it starts fine and looks good across the country for the remainder of the tournament."

"So it's important that you get early wins on the board because you don't want to be on the wrong end of a couple of washouts that might leave you just outside that top four."

Australia failed to qualify for the semi-finals of the 2017 Champions Trophy in England following their rain-off matches against New Zealand and Bangladesh before they lost to England on D/L method.

If the match does get underway, Finch expects unpredictable Pakistan to provide a stern test. They lost to the West Indies by seven wickets in their opening match, but shocked tournament favourites England with a fine performance.

"I think Pakistan are obviously a very dangerous side," Finch said of Pakistan, who have only won one of their last 14 matches against Australia.

"We've seen consistently throughout, especially ICC tournaments, that they win a lot of games and they get themselves in a position to win the tournament."

"They had a great Champions Trophy. So regardless of what kind of form Pakistan go in with, they're always incredibly dangerous." Pakistan survived a defeat



Australia's captain Aaron Finch speaks at a press conference in Taunton, England, yesterday. (AFP)



Australia's Marcus Stoinis suffered a side strain during the match against India on Sunday. (Reuters)

against India in their opening game of the 2017 Champions Trophy before crushing their arch rivals in the final, leaving Finch a firm admirer of several of their players.

"They've got some world-class players. Obviously Babar (Azam) is in great touch batting at No. 3 and holding their batting together," Finn said. "(Mohamed) Amir coming back and he looks to be back to his best. He's swinging the ball again. Wahab (Riaz) has been fast and aggressive. Shadab (Khan) is a great bowler."

"Hasan (Ali) had a great Champions Trophy as well," said Finch of the pace bowler who was the player of the Champions Trophy with 13 wickets in 2017. "When you look down their side there's no player that you can disregard. They've got a lot of experience on their side. They've got a lot of match winners."

STOINIS RULED OUT OF THE NEXT MATCH

Australia all-rounder Marcus Stoinis has been ruled out of their next World Cup match

against Pakistan with a side strain, Finch said yesterday. Stoinis, who has played in all three games for Australia in the tournament, picked up the injury in the match against India at The Oval on Sunday.

All-rounder Mitchell Marsh has been flown over to England as back-up, but the Australians will wait to make a call on whether he permanently replaces Stoinis in their 15-man squad. "Marcus Stoinis has a bit of a side strain. He won't be available for tomorrow," Finch said. "We've got Mitch Marsh flying over just as a bit of a precaution. He was meant to fly over with the Australia A side on Friday."

"He's just coming a couple days early as a bit of precaution. If Stoinis doesn't recover quick enough or doesn't respond to treatment well enough over the next few days." Stoinis bowled seven overs for 62 runs against India, picking up the wickets of Virat Kohli and Mahendra Singh Dhoni. But he was dismissed for a duck and Australia fell 36 runs short of India's total of 352 to lose the match.

BOTTOMLINE

Afghan keeper Shahzad threatens to quit cricket after World Cup axing

Reuters
London

Mohamed Shahzad has threatened to quit cricket after being declared unfit for the remainder of the World Cup by the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB).

The opening batsman and wicketkeeper played in Afghanistan's the first two matches but the ACB cut him from the squad last Thursday, saying his knee injury would not allow him to play any further part in the tournament.

The 32-year-old, who picked up seven runs over the losses to Australia and Sri Lanka, said medical advice he had received said he would have been fit to

play in a few of days after having his knee drained.

"If they don't want me to play, I will quit cricket," an emotional Shahzad told local media after returning to Kabul, according to website ESPNcricinfo.

"I don't see myself playing anymore. If they (ACB) have a problem, they should let me know. I went to a doctor in London and he... said that I could play after resting for two-three days."

"I was removed from the 2015 World Cup and now this one as well. I am going to consult with friends and family, my heart isn't in cricket anymore."

Shahzad, Afghanistan's highest run-scorer in one-day internationals with 2,727 runs, was not selected for the 2015 World Cup due to a lack of fitness and also received a 12-month ban in

2017 for a doping offence.

ACB chief executive Asadullah Khan told ESPNcricinfo that the team's priority was picking match-fit players.

"It's absolutely wrong to say that he was unfairly dropped," Asadullah said.

"We've given a medical report to the ICC to prove that he is unfit, and after thorough deliberation they allowed us to replace him."

"We can't carry unfit players. We understand Shahzad was not fully fit when he still went on to play two games and this is not acceptable anymore."

Afghanistan, who replaced Shahzad with 18-year-old Ikram Ali Khil, next play South Africa in Cardiff on Saturday with both sides looking for their first win of the tournament.



BEREAVEMENT

Malinga takes leave after mother-in-law's death

AFP
Bristol, United Kingdom

Sri Lanka's Lasith Malinga will leave the World Cup to attend his mother-in-law's funeral, but the pace bowler plans to be back for the team's next World Cup match against Australia, the country's cricket board said yesterday.

The 1996 champions were awaiting the start of their game against Bangladesh, which was delayed due to rain in Bristol



yesterday, when news broke that Malinga was scheduled to fly back home after the match.

"Lasith Malinga will leave the team following Sri Lanka's World Cup Game against Bangladesh,

which will be played today, as his Mother-In-Law has passed away," said a Sri Lanka Cricket release. "The player is expected to join the team, before the team's next World Cup game, which will

be played against Australia on the 15th June, 2019."

Dimuth Karunaratne's side have earned three points from three games in the World Cup to far.

They lost to New Zealand in their opening match, then beat Afghanistan before a rain-abandoned game against Pakistan in Bristol on June 7.

If there is no result again in their clash with Bangladesh, it would be a major blow to their hopes of reaching the semi-finals of the 10-team tournament.

Reuters
London

Australia's top order can turn things around if opener David Warner makes another slow start, assistant coach Ricky Ponting said ahead of their World Cup game against Pakistan.

Warner came in for criticism after making just 56 runs off 84 balls against India, with Australia eventually falling 36 short of a target of 353 to lose the match.

And against Afghanistan, seen as having the weakest bowling force at the tournament, Warner also scored at a strike rate well below his career average of 95. "Davey coming back has made runs. By his own admission... (he) probably wasn't at his absolute best," Ponting told cricket.com.au, adding that Warner was not able to rotate as he would have liked against India.

Ponting said Australia was in need of "something pretty spectacular" after the slow start but has the ability to do so. "There's certainly enough skill and talent to turn it around



pretty quickly," he added. The slow start against India also raised questions as to why big hitters such as Glenn Maxwell were not promoted up the order to increase the run rate while Usman Khawaja was dropped down the order to allow Steve Smith to go in at number three. Ponting said it was a matter of having the right combination

to tackle spinners in the middle overs before Maxwell can step up the scoring rate in the final stretch of the innings. "We wanted to have left-hand, right-hand (combinations) with those spinners and we thought Steven plays spin as well as anybody," Ponting added. Australia are due to play Pakistan today in Taunton.



FOCUS

Dhawan injury in focus ahead of New Zealand clash

Reports suggest Rishabh Pant is expected to fly in as cover for Dhawan

AFP
Nottingham, United Kingdom

India yesterday put Shikhar Dhawan under observation over a hand injury that could sideline the batsman for at least two weeks at the World Cup.

Dhawan led India to their second win of the 50-over tournament with his 117 against holders Australia on Sunday, but the opener took a hit near the thumb during the innings and didn't come out to field at the Oval.

Dhawan's injury is a blow to Virat Kohli's side, who will play New Zealand tomorrow before taking on arch rivals Pakistan in Manchester on Sunday.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India did not reveal the extent of Dhawan's injury, but said the left-hander will stay with the team after rumours he would have to be replaced.

"Team India opening batsman Mr Shikhar Dhawan is presently under the observation of the BCCI medical team," said a BCCI statement.

"The team management has decided that Mr Dhawan will continue to be in England and his progress will be monitored.

"Mr Dhawan sustained an injury on the back of his left hand in the region between the index finger and thumb during the CWC 2019 league match against Australia," the statement added.

Team physio Patrick Farhart is assessing Dhawan's injury after the batsman was taken to Leeds for detailed scans.

Dhawan suffered the injury as a result of a nasty blow from a rising delivery by Australia paceman Pat Cummins in the early phase of his innings but



India's Shikhar Dhawan (second from left) receives medical treatment after being hit on the hand with a ball during the 2019 ICC Cricket World Cup match against Australia in London on Sunday. (AFP)

went on to complete his 17th one-day international century. Dhawan, however, played no further part in the match after his dismissal, with substitute Ravindra Jadeja taking the field in his place as India comfortably defended their total of 352 for five to complete a 36-run victory.

BEST-CASE SCENARIO
He has played 10 World Cup matches since his debut in 2010, scoring 537 runs at an average of 53.70.

Kohli called Dhawan a "world-class" player with a "big-match temperament" after his heroics against Australia. Meanwhile, rising star Rishabh Pant and Ambati Rayudu are on the BCCI's official stand-by list in case a replacement for Dhawan is needed.

Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar said Dhawan is a huge asset for the team and should be given every chance to return if his injury heals in time.

"The best case scenario is he is ready in about two weeks time because of the pain threshold he has. Worst case, he will be out for more than 3-4 weeks," Gavaskar told TV channel India Today.

"I would wait if the doctor says he will be ready in 15-20 days. Even if he misses the England game, then he still has games against Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to get him ready for the knockout stages."

Gavaskar said wicketkeeper-batsman Dinesh Karthik can open the innings with Rohit Sharma in Dhawan's absence.

Reports from India suggest Pant, who missed out on making the 15-man World Cup squad, is expected to fly in as cover for Dhawan.

India will start as favourites in the game against New Zealand in Nottingham despite losing a warm-up match to the Black Caps last month.

ANGUSH

Men on the moon so why no reserve days for group stage?: Bangladesh coach

AFP
Bristol, United Kingdom

Bangladesh coach Steve Rhodes said that if men could land on the moon, the World Cup could include reserve days for group matches after the Tigers' fixture against Sri Lanka in Bristol was washed out completely yesterday.

The umpires' decision left tournament chiefs with the unwanted record for the most number of abandoned games at a World Cup, surpassing the two each at the 1992 and 2003 editions.

It was also the second successive World Cup match at Bristol abandoned without a ball bowled after Sri Lanka's game against Pakistan at southwest county Gloucestershire's headquarters on Friday went the same way.

Both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka took a point each a day after rain saw only 7.3 overs play in the match between South Africa and the West Indies in Southampton on Monday.

Although the International Cricket Council have scheduled reserve days for both semi-finals and the July 14 final at Lord's, there are now concerns rain could have a major bearing on which sides qualify for the last four.

'HEADACHE'

Former England wicket-keeper Rhodes, asked if he would have included reserve days in the 10-team round-robin phase, replied: "Yeah, I would."

"If you know the English weather, sadly, we're going to get a lot of rain."

"I know logistically, it would have been a big headache for the tournament organisers, and I know it would have been difficult," he added of a World Cup that features 48 matches in 46 days.

"But we have got quite a lot of time in between games, and if

we have got to travel a day later, then so be it," said Rhodes, whose Bangladesh team next play the West Indies in Taunton on June 17.

"We put men on the moon, so why can't we have a reserve day, when actually this tournament is a long tournament?"

"It's disappointing for the crowd, as well. They have got tickets to see a game of cricket and it would be up to them if they can get there the day after."

Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne endorsed Rhodes's comments by saying: "It is not easy, but I feel if they can have a reserve day, it will be good for everyone."

Heavy overnight and early morning rain delayed yesterday's scheduled 10:30am local time (0930 GMT) start, with further rain seeing the game eventually called off at 1:57pm (1257 GMT).

Rain has also been forecast for today's match between Australia and Pakistan in Taunton.

'MASSIVELY SAD'

Only one of three World Cup matches scheduled to take place in Bristol produced any play, champions Australia launching their title defence with a seven-wicket victory over outsiders Afghanistan.

"It's massively gutting. These are things that are four-and-a-half years in the making, Gloucestershire chief executive Will Brown told AFP. "It's massively sad for the fans."

Brown, asked how much the two abandonments would cost Gloucestershire financially, added: "Our catering around the ground will definitely have taken a hit."

"Do I think it's £50,000 (\$63,588, 56,000 euros)?"

"No. Do I think it's £10,000-£20,000? Quite possibly, yes."

"It's enough for a club like us to make a significant difference," added Brown, who said all three World Cup matches in Bristol had been 11,500 sell-outs.

ICC won't change bails after World Cup wicket problems

AFP
London

The International Cricket Council have ignored pleas from World Cup stars to resolve the bail controversy that threatens to spoil the tournament.

India captain Virat Kohli and Australia skipper Aaron Finch joined forces to condemn the "unfair" problem on Sunday. Australia's David Warner avoided being bowled early in his side's unsuccessful run-chase against India when he deflected Jasprit Bumrah's delivery onto the wicket via his boot.

Not for the first time in this tournament, the ball struck the stumps but failed to dislodge the bails, meaning Warner earned an unexpected reprieve. It was the fifth incident in the tournament of the "zing" balls, which contain lights that flash when the ball hits the wicket, failing to come off when hit. But despite calls for a change to the bails from Kohli, Finch and former England captains Michael Vaughan and Nasser Hussain, tournament organisers have no plans to make a switch back to the traditional wooden style. "We wouldn't change anything mid-event as it would compromise the integrity of the event

— the equipment is the same for all 10 teams across all 48 games," the International Cricket Council, the sport's global governing body, told Sky Sports in a statement yesterday. "The stumps have not changed in the last four years. They have been used in all ICC events since the 2015 Men's Cricket World Cup and in a range of domestic events. "This means they've been used in more than 1000 games — this is a statistical anomaly. "This issue has always been part of the game, with the accepted concept being that it requires some force to disturb a batsman's 'castle.'"



England's Jonny Bairstow (right) inspects the stumps after the bails did not fall despite the ball hitting them as Bangladesh's Mohamed Saifuddin looks on during the match on Saturday. (Reuters)

BOTTOMLINE

England's Wood ready for pace battle with Windies

AFP
London

England fast bowler Mark Wood says his side will "fight fire with fire" when they face the formidable West Indies pace attack.

Friday's World Cup clash in Southampton is likely to be a bouncer barrage, with both teams boasting aggressive bowling line-ups.

The West Indies dismissed Pakistan for 105 at Trent Bridge, the lowest total of the tournament, by unleashing an array of bouncers from Oshane Thomas, Andre Russell and Sheldon Cottrell.

With Wood partnered by Barbados-born paceman Jofra Archer, and both having hit 95mph in the victory over Bangladesh, England are not likely to shrink from the battle. "The Windies in this World Cup have come with a clear



England's Mark Wood (right) celebrates the wicket of Bangladesh's Tamim Iqbal during the 2019 ICC Cricket World Cup match in Cardiff, Wales, on Saturday. (AFP)

game plan and that is a lot of short stuff," Wood said.

"We got a taste of that in the Windies on the recent tour. But I can remember getting Darren Bravo and Hetmyer out to short

balls so it is a good thing we can fight fire with fire.

"It could be like that, just landing blow after blow, back and forth, back and forth. The opposition batsmen don't get a

break if there is pace from both ends and it'd be nice if we can continue that trend.

"When real pace bowling is on show it definitely ruffles a few feathers and changes the mo-

mentum of the game."

Speaking at the weekend Archer nominated himself as the quickest bowler in the England ranks and expressed surprise when told Wood had crept ahead of him with a delivery of 95.6mph — the fastest ball of the tournament.

That head-to-head will continue throughout the competition, with the Durham man not minded to back down.

"It is a good competition between us, a friendly one," he said.

"To have us both bowling at 94 and 95mph and have two guys from the England team at the top of that list is pretty good."

"It pushes us for sure. You're pushing each other to be the best you can be and to be as quick as you can be. You have banter about it for sure, but you're helping each other."

"I'm trying to bowl 0.1 mph quicker than Jofra and he's trying to bowl 0.1 faster than me."

ICC defends no-reserve-day decision, blames 'unseasonable weather'

Reuters
Nottingham, England

The International Cricket Council (ICC) yesterday defended not scheduling reserve days for group matches at the rain-marred World Cup and blamed the disruptions on "extremely unseasonable weather". A record three matches have already been either abandoned or called off in the weather-hit tournament and the forecast is for further washouts this week. The organisers have been criticised for not allotting reserve

days in the group stage and outgoing ICC chief executive David Richardson said it was not a feasible idea.

"Factoring in a reserve day for every match... would significantly increase the length of the tournament and practically would be extremely complex to deliver," he said in a statement. The knockout stage of the six-week tournament includes reserve days but it would post a massive logistical challenge at the group phase and inconvenience everyone, Richardson said. "There is also no guarantee that the reserve day would be free from rain either," he said.



Umpires inspect the pitch after rain delayed the start of the 2019 ICC World Cup match between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in Bristol, England, yesterday. The match was eventually abandoned. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Centre of Excellence takes golf development to a new level at ECGC

Anthony Caira and his team, including golf pros Martin Steel and Rachel Choi, now have some cutting edge technology at the ECGC to help improve golfers

By Sports Reporter
Doha

For Anthony Caira and his fellow golf professionals at the Education City Golf Club (ECGC), it's all about getting the fundamentals right. It's also taking the guess work out of what may look like a great swing but inexplicably to the human eye, is ineffective.

"We were always looking at where the golf ball was flying, and then it was trial and error," Caira, the head golf professional at Qatar's newest golf club, told *Gulf Times*, referring to the time when he grew up in the shadows of St Andrews in Scotland. "The golf club is moving at a hundred miles an hour, you can't see where the (club) face is."

Caira and his team, including golf pros Martin Steel and Rachel Choi, now have some cutting edge technology at the ECGC to help improve golfers, besides getting beginners the right information to facilitate "accelerated learning".

The Centre of Excellence is one of the most holistic facilities in the world, being able to take a golfer from beginner level to an elite tour player. The facility boasts of as many as six studios, with a total of 32 screens, complete with ball tracking technologies, like TrackMan and Flightscope, putting stages that can create countless surface options, biofeedback technologies that facilitates muscle memory, 3D motion capture system, etc, and a fully equipped gymnasium.

There is also a studio which doubles up as a private studio dedicated to women's golf development, with a short-game facility. "We have always anticipated that our Centre of Excellence would be our USP and now that we have it fully installed, and up and running it is clear that it is a facility that is in a class of its own. To have all this modern technology under one

roof being operated by our three highly competent golf professionals will make the learning and development journey of any golfer a much easier one. We are really excited about the prospect of what we can do with the Centre of Excellence to grow the game of golf here in Qatar," said ECGC general manager Michael Braidwood.

All this technology, in tandem with the club's three golf courses, particularly the nine-hole Par 3 course and six-hole championship course, is focused on putting beginners on a fast track to become competent 18-Hole championship course players.

The facility is the first in the Middle East to not only have the 3D Motion capture system GEARS Sport, but also PuttView, a visual putting aid that uses augmented reality. There is also a one-of-a-kind facility with Zen Green, which is a computer-controlled platform that enables golfers to create and practice countless number of putting options in an indoor environment.

"When you can feel a proper golf swing, and see yourself doing it on camera at a particular time, that is a massive advantage," Caira said. "For instance, using the balance lab, you can see where your weight is vis-à-vis your swing. Seeing that as you are making a bad swing, and being able to feel it, record it, and make adjustments is a massive advantage."

And swing is just one aspect of what Caira and his team are looking to get right in those willing to learn.

"Technique in putting is different now. Short game is another element. You have to look at nutrition, fitness, psychology, which is very important. And then you have course management, personality development, making sure you have the right emotions behind every shot, because adrenaline can send the ball further than you want," he said. Back to basics, then.



Anthony Caira, head golf professional at the Education City Golf Club, explains the nitty-gritties of the 3D motion capture system at the Centre of Excellence. PICTURES: Jayan Orma



(From left) Golf pros Martin Steel, Anthony Caira and Rachel Choi demonstrate the functions of the putting studio at the Centre of Excellence at the Education City Golf Club.

CYCLING

Ireland's Bennett storms to stage victory

AFP
Riom, France

Irish speed king Sam Bennett left rival sprinters reeling yesterday, timing his mass bunch sprint effort to perfection to win the pancake flat 171km third stage of the Criterium du Dauphine by a clear margin.

The 28-year-old Bora-hangrohe sprinter has been on sparkling form this season picking up seven stage victories including two at Paris-Nice and making his case for inclusion in the Tour de France team, which is still far from certain.

"I'm the man to beat now so it's more complicated when the other guys are all keeping an eye on you," Bennett said.

"I waited until the last minute but even then I thought maybe I'd gone too soon, but the legs held out."

The Criterium overall leader Belgium's Dylan Teuns of Bahrain Merida kept the yellow jersey as all the main contenders such as Chris Froome, Adam Yates and Richie Porte finished at the same time.

Ahead of a challenging individual time-trial which will reset the agenda on Wednesday, Tuesday's stage was the only flat one on the eight-day Criterium, which is seen as a form gauge for July's Tour de France.

The Eritrean rider Natnael Berhane and Frenchman Quentin Pacher led a long breakaway through the rolling green fields around the Puy-de-Dome region but were caught up with around five kilometres to go.

That set up a classic mass bunch sprint where Bennett came out ahead of Belgian Wout Van Aert and the Italian Davide Ballerini.

Results: Stage 3

1. Sam Bennett (IRL/Bora) 4hr 15min 25sec. 2. Wout Van Aert (BEL/JUM) same time. 3. Davide Ballerini (ITA/AST) s.t. 4. Clement Venturini (FRA/ALM) s.t. 5. Edward Theuns (BEL/TRE) s.t. 6. Edvald Boasson Hagen (NOR/DDT) s.t. 7. Alvaro Hodeg (COL/DEC) s.t. 8. Jens Debusschere (BEL/KAT) s.t. 9. Luka Mezgec (SLO/MIT) s.t. 10. Bjorg Lambrecht (BEL/LOT) s.t.

Overall

1. Dylan Teuns (BEL/Bahrain) 11hr 52min 25sec. 2. Guillaume Martin (FRA/WGG) at 3sec. 3. Alexey Lutsenko (KAZ/AST) 20. 4. Jakob Fuglsang (DEN/AST) 20. 5. Nairo Quintana (COL/MOV) 24. 6. Thibaut Pinot (FRA/FDJ) 24. 7. Michael Woods (CAN/EF) 24. 8. Chris Froome (GBR/INE) 24. 9. Wout Poels (NED/INE) 24. 10. Adam Yates (GBR/MIT) 24. 11. Philippe Gilbert (BEL/DEC) 49. 12. Rudy Molard (FRA/FDJ) 55. 13. Emanuel Buchmann (GER/BOR) 55. 14. Tejay Van Garderen (USA/EF) 55. 15. Romain Bardet (FRA/ALM) 55. 16. Richie Porte (AUS/TRE) 55. 17. Dan Martin (IRL/UAE) 55. 18. Steven Kruijswijk (NED/JUM) 55

US OPEN

Thomas hopes for chance to 'channel inner Koepka'

AFP
Pebble Beach, United States

Justin Thomas says missing the PGA Championship with a wrist injury was difficult but instructive, and he hopes he'll have a chance to apply what he learned watching Brooks Koepka's Bethpage triumph when the US Open tees off this week at Pebble Beach. "I feel like I learned a lot," said the world number seven, who claimed his lone major title at the PGA Championship at Quail Hollow in 2017.

The seven-shot lead Koepka took into the final round at Bethpage last month dwindled to one stroke on the back nine before he emerged with the victory – his fourth major triumph. "Watching how he handled that and the adversity that was thrown at him and just the shots that he hit when he needed to, because I know that I can get a little bit up and down with my emotions," Thomas said on Monday after practising at sun-drenched Pebble.

"I just feel like he handled that really well. So maybe if I got in that scenario then I could – I hate to say channel my inner BK, to boost his ego – but definitely show some of those characteristics."

Thomas has had his own experience defending a big lead. He took a seven-stroke lead into the final day of the 2017 Sony Open, and won by the same margin.

"It's still, to this day, the most nervous I've been teeing off," Thomas said, adding that the pressure only increased with reporters helpfully pointing out that "No one has ever blown a seven-shot lead in



Justin Thomas of the United States speaks during a press conference on the eve of the US Open in Pebble Beach, California. (AFP)

the history of the PGA Tour on Sunday. "Every question I got was led with that," he said. "It was tough at the Sony Open. So I can't imagine how it was at the PGA Championship."

Koepka passed the test and arrived at Pebble Beach this week chasing history.

He can become just the second golfer, after Willie Anderson in 1903, 1904 and 1905 to win three straight US Open

championships after his victories at Erin Hills in 2017 and wind-whipped Shinnecock Hills last year.

Thomas says there's no better place to pursue such a feat than the scenic course on the rugged northern California coast.

"Every major has their 'Oh, wow, you won the US Open at Pebble Beach or you won the Open Championship at St. Andrews,'" Thomas said. "This is as good as

it gets for a US Open."

Koepka was on the course Monday. So was 15-time major champion Tiger Woods – whose 15-shot US Open triumph at Pebble in 2000 remains a monumental achievement. "From what I've heard from everybody, the course is absolutely perfect," said Thomas, who limited himself to the practice areas on Monday. "Jordan (Spieth) said it's the best poa annua greens he's ever seen in his life.

"I'm excited to check it out. I really do love US Opens," Thomas said. "I love the test, the grind. They just have a different feel to them, like all the majors do."

With an iconic venue at their disposal, the US Golf Association will be under the microscope. Woods and world number three Rory McIlroy went on record last month saying they wished the USGA would go back to traditional US Open style course set-up of tight fairways and dense rough, and perhaps forego some of the gimmicky multiple teeing grounds, graduated rough and chipping areas that have featured in recent years.

And plenty of players have continued to grumble about the conditions during the third round at Shinnecock last year, when high winds dried out the greens and made for a brutal day. Players are bound to be frustrated at times on Pebble's Poa annua greens, which tend to become bumpy. But John Bodenhamer, who has taken over the job of course set up for the USGA, says the organizers' aim is to let the players "showcase the very best of who they are. We just want to get out of the way of it, so when they do what they do, that's the show," he said.

FOCUS

Fowler confident of major breakthrough

AFP
Pebble Beach, United States

It's the kind of compliment that can wear thin, but **Rickie Fowler** is confident he'll shed the tag of "best player never to win a major" whether it's at Pebble Beach this week or not. Fowler will tee it up in a major for the 37th time when the US Open begins on Thursday.

The 30-year-old American has won five US PGA Tour titles, but has yet to break through on the game's biggest stages and once again he faced the question of just how big a burden that had become. "It's a compliment in a way," Fowler said. "Obviously there's a lot of great players that haven't won a major."

"It's not necessarily something I think about or worry about. I know that when the time is right, it's going to happen."

Fowler noted he'd put himself in position to win majors, notably at the 2014 PGA Championship at Valhalla when he was left to regret ill-timed miscue at the par-three 14th as Rory McIlroy powered to victory and at Augusta National last year, when he couldn't find enough late birdies to derail Patrick Reed.



"I wouldn't say I've necessarily had one in my hands and let it slip away, which is a good thing," Fowler said. He was looking forward to tackling the challenge again at Pebble Beach, although he's played the California course sparingly.

"I look at Pebble as not necessarily a place that the more you play it you have an advantage," Fowler said. "It's a pretty straightforward golf course. There's only a couple of tee shots that are somewhat blind that you need to just make sure that you're comfortable on lines. It's pretty much right in front of you. Very small greens. "So, I love that about it. It's not very tricky. You hit it in a lot of the middle of the greens here, and you're going to be in a good position."

NBA

Warriors edge Raptors to keep title hopes alive

'IT WASN'T PRETTY IN THE SECOND HALF BUT WE JUST MADE THE SHOTS'



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry (30) reacts after game five of the 2019 NBA Finals against the Toronto Raptors at Scotiabank Arena in Toronto on Monday. **PICTURE:** Kyle Terada-USA TODAY Sports

AFP
Toronto

Clutch 3-pointers by Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson enabled the defending champion Golden State Warriors to edge Toronto 106-105 on Monday and sustain their hopes of winning a third consecutive NBA Finals.

But any joy from the victory was dimmed by a right Achilles injury to Kevin Durant only 12 minutes into his first game after being sidelined for a month by a right calf injury.

Curry scored 31 points while Thompson added 26 as the Warriors pulled within 3-2 in the best-of-seven championship series, forcing a sixth game Thursday at Oakland, California, with game seven if needed in Toronto on Sunday.

"Do or die," Curry said. "It wasn't pretty in the second half but we just made the shots."

Durant's long-awaited return ended with the All-Star forward being helped off the court.

"You could kind of just feel the life just go right out of us," Warriors forward Draymond Green said. "But to Steph's credit, he rallied the troops."

"He talked to everybody, went around the huddle and just told everybody to stay locked in and do this for Kevin. And I think



Toronto Raptors forward Kawhi Leonard (2) drives to the basket against Golden State Warriors guard Klay Thompson (11) during the fourth quarter on Monday. **PICTURE:** Kyle Terada-USA TODAY Sports

we did a good job of coming together."

Durant, the 2017 and 2018 NBA Finals Most valuable

Player, departed the arena on crutches but became an inspiration to his teammates. "We do it for Kevin," Thomp-

son said. "He wants us to compete at the highest level and we'll think of him every time we step on the hardwood."

Durant posted on Instagram: "I'm hurting deep in my soul right now. I can't lie, but seeing my brothers get this win was like taking a shot of tequila. I got new life."

He also breathed life into Golden State's title quest, Curry said.

"We understand the moment and I think we can rally, considering how the second half went," Curry said.

Durant, Golden State's top playoff scorer with 34.2 points a game, will have an MRI on Tuesday.

"On the one hand I'm so proud of them, just the amazing heart and grit they showed, and on the other I'm just devastated for Kevin," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said.

"So it's a bizarre feeling we all have right now, an incredible win and a horrible loss at the same time."

The Warriors seek their fourth title in five seasons while the Raptors suffered an agonizing near-miss in their bid for the first title in their 24-season history.

History remains on the Raptors' side. Only once in 34 prior situations has a team led the NBA Finals 3-1 and lost the title, that being in 2016 when LeBron

James-led Cleveland rallied to defeat Golden State.

Kawhi Leonard, who led Toronto with 26 points, sank a back-to-back 3-pointer and jumper to give the Raptors, who trailed by 14 points in the third quarter, their largest lead at 103-97 with 3:28 remaining.

"In this day and age, up six with three minutes to go, doesn't mean a whole lot," Raptors coach Nick Nurse said. "I felt good at that point. Just needed to make a couple more plays."

Golden State answered with Thompson and Curry sinking 3-pointers and Thompson nailing another that put Golden State ahead to stay at 106-103 with 57 seconds to play.

Kyle Lowry cut the lead to the final margin with 30 seconds remaining and, after Golden State's DeMarcus Cousins was whistled for a foul trying to set a screen, the Raptors had one last chance to swipe the title.

But the Warriors double-teamed Leonard and Green blocked a Lowry corner 3-point shot at the buzzer.

"It has got to be the greatest," Green said when asked to compare the win to others in Golden State's history.

"Down six with a couple minutes to go in an elimination for these guys to win a championship, we could have thrown in the towel. We could have folded, but we didn't."

SPOTLIGHT

Durant's injury exit stuns rivals

AFP
Toronto

When Golden State star Kevin Durant went down 12 minutes into his long-awaited comeback game Monday in the NBA Finals, players on both sides were stunned.

Durant, the 2017 and 2018 NBA Finals Most Valuable Player, suffered a right Achilles tendon injury in the Warriors' 106-105 victory over Toronto, trimming the Raptors' lead to 3-2 in the best-of-seven series.

"It was a real shock when he went down," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "There was just a couple minutes where it all seemed so eerie and strange and it took maybe a little bit for both teams to collect themselves."

Durant, who missed the past month with a right calf injury, planted his foot, pulled up and sat down on the floor. He was helped to the locker room and left the arena on crutches.

"I just tried to refocus, but that was very deflating," Warriors guard Klay Thompson said. "It obviously inspires you to play harder knowing your best player can't be out there."

"You think of him every time you dive for a loose ball or go for a rebound, because I know him and I know how bad he wants to be out there. That's why he was out there. It sucks."

"He's a warrior. He sacrificed his health for us. For him to put his health on the line, to come back and compete at the highest level, we miss him. That's our brother. It's hard to even celebrate this win."

Raptors coach Nick Nurse was just as stunned after Durant opened 3-of-3 from 3-point range and finished with 11 points.

"When anybody goes down you're saddened by it, but when one of the great players like that goes down, it's almost shocking," Nurse said. "Some of the guys on our bench were really shook up."

"It's always a little eerie feeling for everybody when something like that happens on a big stage like this."

As Toronto guard Kyle Lowry put it: "In this league we're all

brothers. And it's a small brotherhood. You never want to see a competitor like him go down."

Warriors general manager Bob Myers said multiple doctors approved Durant to play.

"I don't believe there's anybody to blame but I understand this world and if you have to, you can blame me," Myers said.

"People that questioned whether he wanted to get back to this team were wrong. He's a good teammate. He's a good person. It's not fair."

Warriors swingman Andre Iguodala helped Durant back to the locker room, saying people don't appreciate the bond among the players.

"It's more than basketball. But no one wants to understand that part. They only care about the game," Iguodala said.

"We always talk about how this team is with one another, but people still don't really grasp what we're talking about. When we say this is like a real brotherhood, people have no clue what goes into that and how we feel about each other."

Durant can count on his teammates to be there for him, Warriors guard Stephen Curry said.

"He gave us what he had, he went out there and sacrificed his body," Curry said. "I just feel so bad for him. Nobody should have to go through something like that. He's going to go through some challenges through this process, however long it takes, but we're going to be there for him."

Toronto's Fred VanVleet respected Durant's determination to try and play in a must-win game for Golden State.

"I know we're opponents and competing as hard as we possibly can, but you never want to see anyone get injured," VanVleet said. "He put his body on the line for those guys and that franchise. We feel for him. It's very unfortunate. It sucks."

No one knows that like Toronto star Kawhi Leonard, who missed most of last season with an injury.

"It's devastating," Leonard said. "You see him try to come out and push himself. I feel bad for him. I'm pretty sure he's going to attack each day and get better and come back strong."



Kevin Durant #35 of the Golden State Warriors is consoled by Serge Ibaka #9 of the Toronto Raptors after sustaining an injury on Monday.

BOTTOMLINE

Cautious Popovich wary of World Cup quality

Reuters
Sydney

Even though Gregg Popovich has a roster packed with NBA All-Stars, the United States coach is still a little concerned about the quality of opposition his team will face at the basketball World Cup in August.

USA Basketball, winners of the last two World Cups, named an expanded 20-man roster on Monday for a four-day training camp in Las Vegas from

Aug. 4-8 which included 2019 All-Stars Anthony Davis, Kyle Lowry and James Harden.

The San Antonio Spurs head coach will then cull that to the 12 needed for warm-up games against Spain in Los Angeles on Aug. 16, Australia in Melbourne on Aug. 22 and 24 and Canada in Sydney on Aug. 24.

"This will be a process," Popovich told reporters on a conference call on Tuesday.

"Four days is not enough to do much of anything in life. What's available

and what's necessary are two different things and we need to look at the process to be a team that plays like a team when we get to China.

"Before that, each minute will be important to us. We are fully aware that we don't have a lot of time."

The quality of the opposing teams at the World Cup, many of which will feature NBA players, was a concern for Popovich.

The matches against Australia's Boomers at Melbourne's Docklands stadium, would therefore provide the

US with the final challenge he felt was necessary heading into the Aug. 31-Sept. 15 tournament in China.

"It's obviously a talented group," Popovich said of the Boomers, who have included NBA players such as Philadelphia's Ben Simmons and the Spurs' Paddy Mills in their squad.

"The group has wonderful basketball IQ. They're basketball players. They're not one-on-one players. They are people who understand how to play. They enjoy playing with each other."

"And every country the USA plays

against, they want to beat them (the US) badly. I expect the Australians to be a major factor in the World Cup."

The World Cup title is not the only thing up for grabs in China, with direct qualifying spots for next year's Tokyo Olympics also on the line.

Apart from the 20 players named in the initial squad, USA Basketball have approached others like the Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James to be available for Tokyo next year.

James, one of the game's all-time greats, has not ruled himself out of

contention for Popovich's squad for his fourth Games after he won bronze in Athens in 2004 and golds at Beijing in 2008 and London in 2012.

It was that desire of some of the biggest names in the sport to make themselves available for their national sides that pleased the US team's managing director Jerry Colangelo the most.

"It speaks volumes," Colangelo said. "It says that these players have a passion for the game and for representing their countries. That is all very positive stuff."

NHL

Bruins' pursuit of Cup bigger than Boston hat-trick

'I think both teams will be in a good place mentally, ready to go'



Boston Bruins head coach Bruce Cassidy watches the action against the St. Louis Blues during the second period in game six of the 2019 Stanley Cup Final at Enterprise Center in St. Louis, Missouri. **PICTURE:** Billy Hurst-USA TODAY Sports

By Tom Keegan
Boston Herald

Making the next couple days all about the third leg of a Boston championship hat trick doesn't do justice to the enormity of winning a Stanley Cup.

For the Bruins, nothing is bigger than winning the Cup. Reducing them to one-third of a "bigger" story does them a grave injustice. The Red Sox won the World Series, the Patriots the Super Bowl. That's nice, but all they share is Boston as home, and since the teams play different sports and the leagues have nothing to do with each other, it's really nothing more than a nice coincidence.

Sure it's a feat so rare that no city has pulled it off since Detroit in 1955, but again, what exactly does that have to do with the Bruins?

At this point, all the B's are

thinking about is one game, and the same goes for the Blues, such a tough out.

Carrying the torch for the city doesn't need to enter the thinking of the participants.

"It's one game, winner take all," Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said Monday morning before the team headed for the airport. "I think both teams will be in a good place mentally, ready to go."

History's numbers won't have much to say about which team wins. The home team has won Game 7 12 of the 16 times the Stanley Cup Final has gone the distance. None of those games was played in Boston. On the other hand, the Blues are 9-3 on the road during these Stanley Cup playoffs.

The Blues won't carry the disappointment of not clinching on home ice into the Garden on Wednesday night because that's not what winners do.

Blues coach Craig Berube, hired while the season was in

progress, didn't leave his Sunday night press conference hanging his head. His team had the fewest points in the NHL through Jan. 2, so reaching the ultimate game in the ultimate series already ranks among the more stunning miracles on ice.

"Listen, if you told me four months ago we were going to be in the Final in Game 7, I think I'd take it," Berube said. "We've been a good road team. We've won twice up there in this series, so we're a confident group."

Bruins defenseman Torey Krug has had a terrific postseason. His wife's due date for the couple's first child is a week away.

"Family is the most important thing in this world, for sure, and it's kind of allowed me to relax and just play hockey," Krug said Monday morning. "I'm obviously worried and excited and nervous with all that comes with your first kid, so getting ready to go at home with that, and I've just been able to show

up to the rink and do my job and play hockey with not too much stress."

Distractions are inevitable on any stage so big, and the Blues ended up on the wrong end of one in the hours leading up to Game 6.

The Blues had purchased an ad in St. Louis Post-Dispatch thanking fans, and it was ready to go in the event they won the Stanley Cup on Sunday night. Somebody time-stamped it wrong or hit the wrong button, and the story went out to the paper's e-edition readers on Sunday, well before the puck dropped. Naturally, it ended up on Twitter, caught fire and became a must-read for the Bruins.

This quote from Blues owner Tom Stillman appeared in it: "Winning the Stanley Cup was a dream come true for so many of you. All of us will remember where we were, what we did, and how we felt when the Blues brought the Cup home.

Each of us will have a library of memories to pass down for generations. Each of us will forever think of that person in our lives for whom this time meant so much."

Krug said he read it: "It was everywhere."

It added to the Bruins' already strong motivational fuel, and so did Patrice Bergeron's pregame pep talk.

"When he talks, everyone listens," Krug said. "He shows up in big moments, and he's able to perform with the best of them. He's an elite hockey player and an unbelievable person, a great friend and an unbelievable teammate, so any time a guy like that speaks up, you listen."

The Bruins have done a good job of listening to each other and tuning out the noise. The same can be said for the Blues. The waiting is not the hardest part for either side. Defeating a very tough opponent is the hardest part, and both clubs are charged with that task.

SPOTLIGHT

Red Sox legend David Ortiz flown to Boston for treatment



Agencies
Los Angeles

Former slugger David Ortiz arrived in Boston on a Red Sox team plane and was taken to a hospital on Monday, a day after he was shot in the back while at a Dominican Republic nightclub.

The Red Sox legend was transported from Boston's Logan Airport to Massachusetts General Hospital by ambulance with a police escort.

Ortiz, recognized as the beloved "Big Papi" by baseball fans during his 14 seasons in Boston, had been listed in stable condition in the intensive care unit of a Dominican Republic hospital earlier Monday following surgery for gunshot wounds.

ESPN's Enrique Rojas tweeted Monday afternoon that Dr. Abel Gonzalez, who performed the surgery in the Dominican Republic, had said Ortiz, 43, was in stable enough condition to travel.

"David Ortiz is probably the most beloved and one of the most important players in our history, leading us to multiple World Series championships, and an active member in the community," said Red Sox team president Sam Kennedy during a news conference on Monday. "I would be hard-pressed to think of anyone more beloved than David. It's a very difficult day for the organization."

He added that "it's hard to express what David Ortiz means to

the Boston Red Sox."

The 43-year-old Ortiz, recognized as the beloved "Big Papi" by Boston fans during his 14 seasons with the Red Sox, was shot while visiting a nightclub.

Doctors removed his gallbladder and part of his colon and intestines, and Ortiz also sustained liver damage.

A team spokesman said Monday evening that an air ambulance carrying Ortiz had departed the Dominican bound for Boston and the Massachusetts General Hospital for continuing treatment.

"Doctors say he is out of danger," Ortiz's spokesman Leo Lopez told ESPN.

Two other people were wounded in the shooting, including Dominican TV host Jhoel Lopez who was with Ortiz, ESPN reported, quoting the Dominican National Police director.

It was not known who was the intended target.

Ortiz, who was born in Santo Domingo, made 10 All-Star appearances in his 20-year career. He retired three years ago.

The former designated hitter hit 541 home runs with 1,768 RBIs in 2,408 games in the majors.

Ortiz began his career by playing six seasons for the Minnesota Twins (1997-2002), but his career took off after he joined the Red Sox.

He helped Boston capture their first World Series title in 86 years in 2004, when he was the MVP of the American League Championship Series.

Vikings' Rudolph gets 4-year extension

Minneapolis: The Minnesota Vikings and tight end Kyle Rudolph agreed to a multiyear contract extension Monday night. Rudolph, who had just one year left on his previous deal, confirmed on his Twitter account that he is staying with the Vikings long term. ESPN and NFL.com both reported that he landed a four-year, \$36m extension. The tweet, which ended with the hashtag "UnfinishedBusiness" read in part, "I am honoured beyond words to say that my home, our home, will always be... in Minnesota!"

The new contract is expected to lower Rudolph's salary-cap hit to help the team, which has little available cap room, according to ESPN.

The move comes weeks after the

Vikings selected Alabama tight end Irv Smith Jr. in the second round of the draft, with the 50th overall pick.

Rudolph, 29, subsequently said he was looking forward to playing in more sets with two tight ends.

"It's exciting," Rudolph told ESPN. "It's something, an element, that we've never had here in my nine years being here. It forces defenses to play with three linebackers, and that allows us to control the game, when we go out there in three-wide sets. People always talk about creating mismatches — well, now they have five DBs on the field, and yeah, there's still mismatches, there's size mismatches, but now we can kind of control and do things how we want to do them."

MLB

D-backs top Phils in record 13-homer game

Agencies
New York

The Diamondbacks hit a franchise-record eight home runs, and they combined with the Phillies for a major-league-record 13 homers as Arizona won 13-8 at Philadelphia on Monday.

Arizona's Eduardo Escobar hit two home runs and finished with four hits and five RBIs. Ildemaro Vargas also hit two home runs while Jarrod Dyson, Ketel Marte, David Peralta and Alex Avila each homered for the Diamondbacks.

Marte had three hits and two runs as the Diamondbacks won their fifth in a row. The Diamondbacks' previous season high for home runs in a game was five.

The Phillies added five home runs — two by Scott Kingery and one apiece for Jean Segura, Rhys Hoskins and Jay Bruce. Kingery also had a triple in his 3-for-5 game for the Phillies, who dropped their second in a row.

ROCKIES 6, CUBS 5

Charlie Blackmon homered and had three hits, Nolan Arenado and



Arizona Diamondbacks third baseman Eduardo Escobar (5) hits a two-run home run during the fourth inning against the Philadelphia Phillies at Citizens Bank Park on Monday. **PICTURE:** Eric Hartline-USA TODAY Sports

Ian Desmond also hit home runs, and Colorado beat Chicago in Denver.

Ryan McMahon had a tiebreaking single in the eighth to lift the Rockies. Scott Oberg (4-0) pitched an inning of relief, and Wade Davis got the final three outs for his eighth save.

David Bote, Anthony Rizzo and Kyle Schwarber all hit third-inning homers for the Cubs.

ANGELS 5, DODGERS 3

Wilfredo Tovar's fielder's choice plated the tiebreaking run, and Mike Trout smacked a two-run homer as the Los Angeles Angels rallied to beat the Los Angeles Dodgers to begin the Freeway Series at Anaheim, Calif.

The Angels pushed across two runs in the bottom of the eighth without benefit of a hit as they won for just the third time in the past eight games.

Ty Buttrey (4-2) worked the eighth, and Hansel Robles worked out of a ninth-inning jam for his eighth save. Chris Taylor delivered a two-run double for the Dodgers, who fell for only the fourth time in the last 17 games.

BRAVES 13, PIRATES 7

Host Atlanta hit a season-high five

home runs, including two by Ozzie Albies and a grand slam by Ronald Acuna Jr., and the Braves rolled over Pittsburgh.

Acuna delivered his 15th homer to highlight a five-run outburst in the second inning that erased a 1-0 deficit and put the Braves ahead to stay. Albies added a solo homer in the third and another in the seventh, his eighth and ninth. Freddie Freeman hit his 18th homer in the fourth, a two-run shot.

Atlanta third baseman Josh Donaldson and Pittsburgh starter Joe Musgrove and manager Clint Hurdle were ejected in the first inning.

RAYS 6, ATHLETICS 2

Aided by three home runs, Charlie Morton extended his unbeaten streak to 21 games with seven shutout innings as Tampa Bay won the opener of a three-game series with Oakland in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Brandon Lowe, Kevin Kiermaier and Ji-Man Choi hit two-run homers, helping the Rays prevail in their first meeting of the season with the A's.

RANGERS 4, RED SOX 3 (11 INNINGS)

Elvis Andrus hit a tiebreaking sin-

gle in the 11th inning as Texas rallied past host Boston to begin a four-game series.

Andrus' game-winner drove in Danny Santana, who began the frame with his fourth hit of the game, a double. Jesse Chavez (2-1) escaped a bases-loaded jam with two outs in the 10th to get the win for Texas, and Chris Martin pitched a perfect bottom of the 11th for his second save.

CARDINALS 4, MARLINS 1

Marcell Ozuna scored two runs in his return to his former home stadium, and Michael Wacha pitched six scoreless innings as St. Louis won at Miami.

Ozuna went 2-for-3 with a double, a single and a walk as the Cardinals snapped a three-game losing streak despite getting just four hits. Ozuna is 5-for-7 in his past two games and is hitting .462 in seven career games against the Marlins.

Wacha (4-2) improved his career record against Miami to 3-0. He allowed five hits — all singles — and two walks, striking out four in his first win since May 9. He had been relegated to the bullpen after losing his second straight start on May 22.



WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

Roord heads late Dutch winner to beat Kiwis

Sweden strike late to beat Chile after a long hold-up because of a violent storm

AFP
Le Havre, France

Jill Roord came off the bench and headed home from close range in added time yesterday to give the Netherlands a 1-0 women's World Cup victory over New Zealand in Le Havre. The victory lifts the European champions into a tie with Canada atop Group E.

"I think we can play better than we did today. But we were looking for a win and New Zealand were looking for a draw, and I'm very glad we finally got what we wanted," said Dutch coach Sarina Wiegman. "I'm very relieved, of course."

The Football Ferns, stout in defence and sharp on the counter attack, were left with nothing but disappointment. "The players will be absolutely devastated but we're a resilient group and I'm pretty confident we'll bounce back," said New Zealand coach Tom Sermanni.

The stars of a lively match were the two goalkeepers, Sari van Veenendaal for the Netherlands and New Zealand's Erin Nayler. Both were busy and both, at different stages, underwent on-field treatment after brave saves.

The Dutch had almost 70% of possession and almost three times as many goal attempts but New Zealand went painfully close three times. "The Dutch were the dominant team but we created some great chances," said Sermanni.

In the first half, Olivia Chance hit the bar and Rosie White drew a sprawling save from Van Veenendaal with a long-range strike. Early in the second half Sarah Gregorius, who is of Dutch descent, shinned a volley into the ground that gave Van Veenendaal time to lunge to her right and claw the ball round the post.

At the other end, centre-backs Rebekah Stott and Abby Erceg coped well with the physical presence of Dutch forward Vivianne Miedema and the lively skills of the attackers around her. When the Dutch did carve a clear chance, they were frustrated either by Nayler or some anxious finishing, until the final moments. "We found it tough to cre-



Netherlands' Jill Roord celebrates scoring against New Zealand in the Women's World Cup Group E match in Le Havre, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

ate openings," said FIFA's player of the match Lieke Martens. "New Zealand defended well and it was not our best match, that's clear."

The Dutch swung one more hanging cross to the far post where Lineth Beerensteyn bullied Ali Riley into a tame header back against the goal and Arsenal's Roord guided the ball past the advancing Nayler. "We can't go away from the

game saying we have regrets, we have disappointment," said Sermanni, who has coached four of the nations in this year's World Cup. "We've got to look at the positive things we did."

Later, Sweden scored two late goals to beat Chile 2-0 after a long hold-up in their women's World Cup match in Rennes because of a violent storm which led to conditions deteriorating.

Torrential rain had been falling for around a quarter of an hour amid a threat of thunderstorms when the Mexican referee, Lucila Venegas, decided to take the players off in the 72nd minute with the score still 0-0.

Play eventually resumed following a break of around 40 minutes, and Kosovare Asllani fired into the roof of the net to give Sweden the lead in the 83rd

minute. Substitute Madelen Janogy then ran through and smashed in the second goal in injury time to wrap up the win for the Swedes, the 2003 World Cup runners-up and beaten Olympic finalists in 2016.

The teams are in Group F along with holders the United States and Thailand, who were playing late match last night in Reims.

Rebuilding Roma name Fonseca as new coach

Roma: Paulo Fonseca was named new Roma coach yesterday, as the Serie A club look to bounce back from a traumatic season that saw them go through two managers and fail to qualify for the Champions League.

In a statement, Roma said that former Shakhtar Donetsk coach Fonseca joins on an initial two-year contract with the option to extend for a further year. "I am excited and motivated by the task ahead of us. I cannot wait to move to Rome, meet our fans and get started," the 46-year-old Portuguese was quoted as saying by the club's Twitter account. "Together, I believe we can create something special."

Fonseca arrives in Rome after three years at Shakhtar, where he won three straight domestic doubles after taking the reins in 2016. He also took the Ukrainians to the Champions League last 16 in 2018.

Roma reached the Champions League semi-finals the same year but last season were dumped out by Porto in the last 16 and hobbled to sixth in Serie A, leaving them in the second qualifying round for the less-lucrative Europa League.

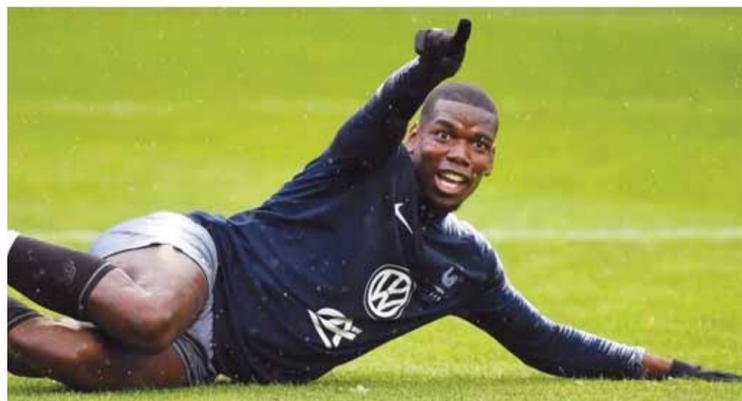
The capital club finished the campaign with Claudio Ranieri as interim boss after sacking Eusebio Di Francesco in early March, with sporting director Monchi following the former Sassuolo coach out the door.

They were rebuffed by both former Chelsea and Juventus coach Antonio Conte, who has taken the job at Inter Milan, and Gian Piero Gasperini, who decided to stay at Atalanta after he guided his side to their best ever league season and a spot in the Champions League.

Without the revenues from European football's biggest competition Roma will likely sell some of their bigger names, with Edin Dzeko strongly tipped to join Conte at Inter.

SPOTLIGHT

Pogba's remedy for racist abuse is play well not walk off



AFP
London

Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba said the best way to quell racist spectators is to perform well on the pitch not as some suggest walk off if there is racial abuse. The 26-year-old was a pivotal figure as France won the World Cup last year and said in an interview with *The Times* that nothing wins people around better than success.

Pogba played 90 minutes in Euro 2020 qualifying loss in Turkey on Saturday when the home fans caused outrage in France by jeering the Marseille. Racism reared its head last season with Manchester City's Raheem Sterling being abused by a group of Chelsea fans.

Then Sterling and other black England players were the targets of Montenegro supporters in a Euro 2020 qualifier. One of those players, Tottenham Hotspur defender Danny Rose said he "can't wait to see the back of football" because of the lack of decisive action to tackle racism.

Rose said he was "shocked" at

the lightness of UEFA's punishment in ordering Montenegro to play just one game behind closed doors. Pogba told the newspaper he had once handed his Juventus shirt to a fan who had been making monkey noises at him. "Leave the pitch? You want to play, you want to score for your team," said Pogba. "And at the end they (racist abusers) will come and ask for a picture."

Pogba also responded to critics who say he has not justified his then world record £89.3mn (\$113.5mn) move from Juventus in 2016. "I become another player because of the transfer," he said. "Because it was the biggest transfer of history at the time, you get judged differently. You expect more because of the price tag. A good game becomes a normal game, a top game will be a good game."

He proved a popular target when United started poorly last season under Jose Mourinho. Critics contrasted Pogba's outstanding World Cup performances with those for his club. He also came under fire as United's early good form under Ole Gunnar Solskjaer - who replaced Mourinho when the latter was sacked in December - tailed off

at the end of the campaign.

As a result, United finished sixth and missed out on Champions League football. However, Pogba can point to being the only player selected in the Premier League team of the season to come from outside the top two - champions Manchester City and Liverpool.

He believes his appearance - various styles of haircuts and his body language on the pitch - plays a role in his being pilloried. "I always play like that and, thank God, I won the World Cup like that," said Pogba.

"Body language, haircut, all these things is just to speak. Since I was a kid I play like this," he said. "It's not a problem when we win. Only when we lose or if I have a bad performance it becomes a problem."

Pogba, who scored 13 goals in 35 Premier League appearances last season, says he has not changed as a person despite his success and becoming one of the highest earning footballers in the world. "I am still the Paul I used to be as a kid," he said. "I grow, I become taller, but I am the same person who follows his dream. "People will love me like that. People will hate me like that."

ROUND-UP

Fifteen Serie A clubs vote against proposed Champions League reform

Fifteen of Serie A's 20 clubs have voted against a proposal to create a semi-closed Champions League from 2024 onwards. In a statement, the clubs backed a resolution which said that qualification for UEFA club competitions such as the Champions League should be based exclusively on performances in domestic leagues, as happens at present.

Juventus were the only club to vote against the resolution while Inter Milan, AC Milan, AS Roma and Fiorentina all abstained. The European Club Association (ECA), which represents the region's most powerful clubs, and UEFA have proposed creating a three-tier pan European league with promotion and relegation between divisions, according to league officials who have seen it.

The top tier would be the new version of the Champions League, but 24 of the 32 teams would keep their places for the following season, breaking the tradition that qualification is achieved through domestic competition.

The ECA, whose chairman Andrea Agnelli is Juventus president, says it wants to help clubs outside the biggest five leagues by giving them more regular European matches. England's Premier League, Germany's Bundesliga and France's Ligue 1 have already said they op-

pose the proposal. However, some clubs from outside Europe's biggest leagues, such as Ajax Amsterdam, Legia Warsaw and HJK Helsinki are in favour.

TOTTENHAM TARGET DRAXLER SEES FUTURE AT PSG

Germany midfielder Julian Draxler has played down rumours linking him to Tottenham Hotspur and said he wants to stay at Paris Saint-Germain. "I feel very happy here, I am playing for a great coach at a great club," Draxler, 25, said.

Draxler, who earned his 50th cap in Germany's 2-0 win over Belarus last Saturday, has been in and out of the PSG first eleven since joining the club in 2017. He has recently been linked with Bayern Munich, Bayer Leverkusen and Tottenham Hotspur, but the midfielder said that he was keen to extend his contract in Paris, which runs until 2021.

"PSG is a crazy club in a positive way, things can happen from one day to the next, but I don't think anybody is looking to kick me out here," he said. "I will prepare for next season just like the last, and if I am offered a new contract, I will listen."

Asked directly about rumours of a move to Tottenham or Bayern last Saturday, Draxler

said that he had "no intention" of leaving PSG. "I can't say anything about the rumours. I haven't heard anything about it from the club, and I haven't spoken with anyone," he said.

LIPPI MAKES IT TWO WINS IN TWO SINCE CHINA RETURN

Marcello Lippi made it two wins from two matches since returning as China coach with a 1-0 home victory over Tajikistan yesterday. Forward Yang Xu scored the only goal in a low-key friendly in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou, with Lippi fielding an experimental side. Lippi, the 71-year-old who guided his native Italy to World Cup glory in 2006, has now won both games since he returned last month to the helm. He had stood down as China coach after a 3-0 defeat to Iran in the Asian Cup quarter-finals in January.

On Friday, China, 74th in the FIFA rankings, defeated lower-ranked Philippines 2-0 in another home friendly. Against Tajikistan, who were similarly obliging visitors and ranked 120th by FIFA, Lippi's side started the second half with six players from Chinese Super League (CSL) leaders Beijing Guoan.

Under Lippi, China are attempting to reach the World Cup for just the second time. Qualifiers for Qatar 2022 begin in the autumn.

U-23

Qatar beat Bahrain at Toulon Tournament

Qatar Under-23 team overcame Bahrain 4-2 in penalties to finish 11th at the Toulon International Football Tournament in Southern France yesterday. The teams were locked 1-1 at full time.

Bahrain went ahead in the 28th minute courtesy Salem Adel Hassan's strike, but Qatar fought back in the second half and equalised through substitute Khalid Muneer Mazeed in the 67th minute as the game went to penalties. In the penalties, Qatar players held their nerves and converted four of the five penalties, while Bahrain were only successful in finding the net twice. Qatar had lost all their group matches against France, Guatemala and Brazil.

The tournament was an opportunity for Qatar to prepare for next year's AFC U-23 World Cup in Thailand, which is a qualifying tournament for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.



Qatar players celebrate after winning their match against Bahrain in Toulon, Southern France.

WORLD CUP AND AFC ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

Cambodia advance at Pakistan's expense

AFC
Doha

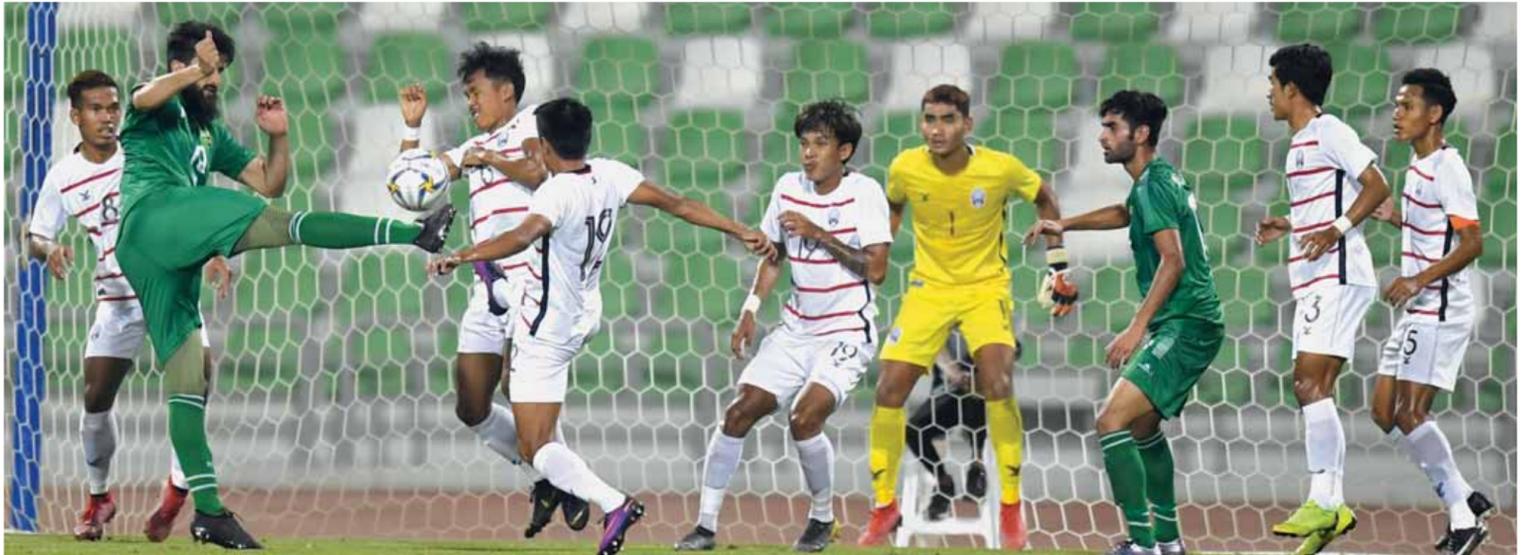
Cambodia cruised into the next round of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup 2023 Joint Qualification after defeating Pakistan 2-1 in the second leg yesterday, advancing 4-1 on aggregate.

Having won the first leg 2-0 last Thursday, Cambodia started with a massive advantage, but the Pakistanis, cheered on loudly by some 250 odd spectators, gave them a serious scare before losing steam midway through the second half and crashing to a 2-1 defeat at the Al Ahli stadium in Doha.

Pakistan coach Jose Antonio Nogueira had promised an improved performance after his boys squandered a few chances in the first leg, and things certainly looked good for them after the initial 10 minutes of circumspection during which the Cambodians dominated the exchanges.

In the seventh minute, Cambodia's Prak Mony Udom saw his powerful shot from just outside the box sail wide of the Pakistani goal. Four minutes later Udom was in the thick of the action once again but his well-executed free-kick was punched away by Pakistan goalkeeper Yousuf Butt.

Butt kept egging on his players loudly and often took risks, advancing far up in a desperate bid to overturn the deficit, and sure enough Pakistan saw a glimmer of hope when Ouk Sovann handled



Pakistan's Hassan Bashir (second left) takes aim at the goal against Cambodia during the 2022 World Cup Qatar and Asian Cup 2023 Joint Qualification match in Doha yesterday. **PICTURE:** Noushad Thekkayil

the ball inside the box and earned a yellow card for his troubles.

Adnan Bashir stepped up and easily scored past Cambodia goalkeeper Keo Soksela to put Pakistan ahead in the 18th minute. Bashir had another golden chance to score a couple of minutes

later shot wide with the goalkeeper at his mercy. With the enterprising Mohamed Adnan Yaqoob proving more than a handful on the right flank, the Cambodia defenders were under serious pressure. In the 36th minute a fine corner kick taken by Adnan found Ba-

shir, but the forward's powerful header missed the target. Pakistan had another opportunity just before half-time but Ali Uzair's cracking effort was thwarted by goalkeeper Soksela.

Soksela acquitted himself very well in the second half too, saving a cou-

ple of shots from Rahees Nabi. But the Cambodians rallied splendidly thereafter creating chance after chance and sure enough got the equaliser in the 64th minute with Keo Sokpheng scoring off a Sath Rasib pass, taking advantage of some poor Pakistani defending.

Having opened their account, the Cambodians upped the tempo, finally nailing the win through substitute Reung Bunheing, who netted off a Sieng Chanthea pass in the 89th minute just five minutes after coming in as a substitute for Keo Sokpheng.

EURO 2020 QUALIFIERS

Spain beat Sweden as Ireland labour against Gibraltar

Spain are five points ahead of Sweden and Romania at the top of the six-team group

AFP
Paris

Sergio Ramos and Alvaro Morata both scored penalties as Spain got the better of Sweden on Monday night, while the Republic of Ireland and Poland continued their strong starts in qualifying for Euro 2020.

Three-time European champions Spain ran out 3-0 winners in their Group F encounter with the Swedes at the Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid, recovering from the early frustration of seeing a Rodrigo Moreno effort wrongly disallowed for offside. They won a penalty just after the hour when Sebastian Larsson blocked a Marco Asensio cross with his arm, and captain Ramos converted the spot-kick. It was the Real Madrid defender's 20th goal for his country, his seventh in his last eight matches.

Morata, who had come on as a second-half substitute, won another penalty late on when he was brought down in the box by Filip Helander, and he duly netted from 12 yards too. Real Sociedad striker Mikel Oyarzabal, also on from the bench, wrapped up the win with three minutes left. The result means Luis Enrique's side have the maximum 12 points from four matches and are five points ahead of Sweden and Romania at the top of the six-team section. The top two teams in each group qualify for the finals. "These matches are more difficult than the result makes them look," Morata told Spanish media. "We played well, defended well and we are very happy."

Romania, who host Spain next in September, eased to a 4-0 win in Malta. Norway, whose only appearance at the Euros so far came in 2000, got their first win of the campaign as they beat the Faroe Islands 2-0 away thanks to a brace from US-born forward Bjorn Johnsen.

Ireland are top of Group D with 10 points from four games after again doing the minimum to get the better of minnows Gibraltar. Mick McCarthy's team won 1-0 on the rock in March and won 2-0 against the same opponents this time. They went ahead in Dublin when David McGoldrick's wayward shot went in thanks to a wicked deflection off Joseph Chipolina.

Robbie Brady then wrapped up the victory at the death. "If the remit for me was to get 10 points, which I'm sure it was, that job's done," McCarthy said. Ireland are five points ahead of Denmark, with whom they drew in Copenhagen at the weekend. However, the Danes have a game in hand and romped to a 5-1 win over Georgia on Monday, with Kasper



Spain's Alvaro Morata (left) celebrates with Sergio Ramos after scoring a penalty during the UEFA Euro 2020 group F qualifying match against Sweden at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on Monday night. **(AFP)**

Dolberg of Ajax scoring twice. Tottenham Hotspur star Christian Eriksen scored a penalty, while Yussuf Poulsen and Martin Braithwaite also netted.

Poland have maximum points after four games in Group G, with hotshots Krzysztof Piatek and Robert Lewandowski both on target in a 4-0 defeat of Israel in Warsaw. Austria boosted their chances of qualifying as West Ham United's Marko Arnautovic bagged a brace in a 4-1 victory in North Macedonia, while Slovenia romped to a 5-0 win in Latvia.

The Czech Republic joined England on six points at the top of Group A thanks to a 3-0 defeat of Montenegro, although they have now played a game more than Gareth Southgate's side. In the same group, Kosovo registered their first win in qualifying for a Euro or a World Cup, coming from behind to beat Bulgaria 3-2 in Sofia thanks to Elbasan Rashani's inju-

ry-time strike.

Ukraine are six points clear at the top of Group B after beating Luxembourg 1-0, while Aleksandar Mitrovic scored twice and new Real Madrid signing Luka Jovic got one goal as Serbia defeated Lithuania 4-1. Newly crowned UEFA Nations League winners, and reigning European champions, Portugal will resume their qualifying campaign in Serbia in September sitting eight points behind Ukraine.

EURO 2020 QUALIFIERS RESULTS

Group A: At Olomouc, Czech Republic: Czech Republic 3 (Jankto 18, Kopitovic 49-og, Schick 82-pen) Montenegro 0; At Sofia: Bulgaria 2 (Popov 43, Dimitrov 55) Kosovo 3 (Rashica 14, Muriqi 64, Rashani 90+3)

Group B: At Lviv, Ukraine: Ukraine 1 (Yaremchuk 6) Luxembourg 0; At Belgrade: Serbia 4 (Aleksandar Mitrovic

20, 34, Jovic 35, Ljajic 90+2) Lithuania 1 (Novikovas 71-pen)

Group D: At Dublin: Republic of Ireland: 2 (Joseph Chipolina 29-og, Brady 90+3) Gibraltar 0; At Copenhagen: Denmark 5 (Dolberg 13, 63, Eriksen 30-pen, Yussuf Poulsen 73, Braithwaite 90+3) Georgia 1 (Lobzhanidze 25)

Group F: At Madrid: Spain 3 (Ramos 64-pen, Morata 85-pen, Oyarzabal 87) Sweden 0; At Ta'Qali, Malta: Malta 0 Romania 4 (Puscas 7, 29, Chipciu 34, Man 90+1); At Torshavn: Faroe Islands 0 Norway 2 (Johnsen 49, 83)

Group G: At Warsaw: Poland 4 (K Piatek 35, Lewandowski 56-pen, Grosicki 59, Kadzior 84) Israel 0; At Riga: Latvia 0 Slovenia 5 (Crnigoj 24, 27, Ilicic 29-pen, 44, Zajc 47); At Skopje: North Macedonia 1 (Hinteregger 18-og) Austria 4 (Lazarro 39, Arnautovic 62-pen, 82, Bejtulai 86-og)

SPOTLIGHT

Messi is sports world's highest earner: Forbes

AFP
New York

Lionel Messi was the world's highest paid athlete over the past year, Forbes reported yesterday in its annual sporting rich list. Barcelona and Argentina star Messi dethroned retired boxer Floyd Mayweather as the sports world's highest earner, raking in \$127mn via salary and endorsement deals.

That put Messi ahead of long-time rival Cristiano Ronaldo, the Juventus and Portugal star who was second with earnings of \$109mn. Brazil and Paris Saint-Germain striker Neymar completed a sweep of the top three positions by footballers, coming in third with earnings of \$105mn.

The fourth highest earner on the list was Mexico's middle-weight boxing star Saul "Canelo" Alvarez with \$94mn.

Alvarez, who defeated Genady Golovkin last September to become the unified middle-weight champion, inked the richest deal in boxing history last October, signing a five-year 11-fight contract with streaming network DAZN worth \$365mn.

Evergreen tennis star Roger Federer was fifth on the list with total earnings of \$93.4mn. The bulk of Federer's earnings came through lucrative endorsement deals, with the 20-time Grand Slam singles champion pocket-



ing \$86mn.

Stars from the NFL and NBA rounded out the top 10 on the list, with Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson sixth on \$89.5mn, just ahead of Green Bay Packers signal-caller Aaron Rodgers (\$89.3mn).

Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James was the highest earning NBA player, with \$89mn, while Golden State's Stephen Curry was ninth with \$79.8mn. Curry's Golden State team-mate Kevin Durant was 10th on the rankings with \$65.4mn.

Former world number one Tiger Woods was 11th on the list with \$69.3mn, which included an estimated \$54mn in endorsements. Meanwhile tennis superstar Serena Williams was the only woman to make the list, coming in at 63rd with earnings of \$29.2mn.

FOCUS

Argentina's Mercado to leave Sevilla for Qatar's Al Rayyan

AFP
Doha

Argentina international Gabriel Mercado has signed for Qatari team Al Rayyan, the club said on Twitter on yesterday, following a three-year stint at Sevilla.

"In our first deal for the new season, the club announces it has officially signed the Argentine defender Gabriel Mercado to be one of our foreign players for next season," Al Rayyan posted on its Twitter account along with a photo of Mercado holding a team jersey. It added that he had signed a contract but gave no details about its duration or terms.

However Spanish media reported that Mercado had been handed a one-year deal. Mercado had expressed his desire to be a "necessary addition" to the Qatari league side, said a subsequent tweet. A number of high-profile players have in recent years found homes in Qatar



which will host the World Cup in 2022. Former Barcelona great Xavi Hernandez announced in 2015 he would join Qatari side Al Sadd and was named the club's coach last month.