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ATHLETICS

World champ Barshim makes a smashing return from injury

By Sports Reporter
 Doha

Less than 100 days from the IAAF World Athletics Championships Doha 2019, Qatari high jump star and World champion Mutaz Essa Barshim is back from his ankle injury to do what he knows best – winning.

At the Sopot Grand Prix in Poland yesterday, Barshim, who had been sidelined due to an ankle injury from a little less than a year ago, cleared 2.27m for a victory. He even made attempts at 2.30m and 2.33m but 2.27m seemed like a good enough mark to send warning bells ringing.

Malaysia's Nauraj Singh Randhawa finished second with a 2.24m effort, while Vadym Kravchuk of Ukraine was third after clearing 2.21m.

"I just want to give thanks to God, my family and friends, everyone who believed in me (sic)," Barshim posted on his Instagram account yesterday.

"Been to really difficult times and to be honest I was not sure if I was ever going to be able to jump again but I believe everything happens for a reason."

After hinting about having his book published in the post, Barshim added, "2019 officially starts... Happy with that start now back to work #Doha2019."

Barshim was forced out of action in July last year when he injured his ankle while making an attempt at breaking the world record. With the win already in the bag with a 2.40m effort at the Gyulai Memorial in Szekesfehervar, Hungary, the 2017 World Athlete of the Year had the bar raised to what would have been a world record of 2.46m.

When he landed on the mat on his second try, it was clutching his left ankle. While the star thought he had suffered a fracture, it eventually turned out to be a torn ligament that forced him out of action for the rest of the season. He only returned to training in April this year, ahead of the Asian Athletics Championships, a test event for September's IAAF World Athletics Championships, at Doha's Khalifa International Stadium.

He had told *Gulf Times* then, "I really wanted to do it because the (Asian) championships were being held at home. Luckily I have bigger championships at home coming soon, so I said to myself, 'You know what, sometimes that's how sport is!'"

"I have just come back from an injury, and I don't want to do something that will cost me the World Championships later. So I want to make sure that I am a 100 percent fit."



ICC CRICKET WORLD CUP

Pakistan ease to victory to end South Africa's hopes

South Africa, with three points from their opening seven matches, are unable to secure a spot in the top four

Reuters
 London

Haris Sohail smashed a rapid-fire 89 as Pakistan ended South Africa's World Cup hopes with a comfortable 49-run win at Lord's yesterday.

Sohail's dominant 59-ball knock and a tidy half century from Babar Azam helped Pakistan reach 308-7, a total that South Africa never threatened to surpass.

South Africa captain Faf du Plessis offered their only real resistance with a 79-ball 63 in another poor batting display from his side.

Wahab Riaz and Shadab Khan took three wickets each as Pakistan condemned South Africa to a fifth defeat of the tournament that left them languishing ninth in the 10-team table.

While Pakistan's slim hopes of reaching the knockout stages stayed alive, South Africa, with three points from their opening seven matches, are unable to secure a spot in the top four – who all advance to the semi-finals.

Pakistan got off to a flying start with openers Fakhar Zaman and Imam-ul-Haq hammering 29 off the first four overs, against a South Africa side who looked visibly dejected in the face of the early onslaught.

Yet the bleeding was stemmed as South Africa steadied and with the run-rate under control they began to threaten, as both openers departed for 44 to Imran Tahir while Aiden Markram claimed the wicket of Mohamed Hafeez for 20.

Azam picked up the pace with 69 off 80 balls before he was caught off the bowling of Andile Phehlukwayo to leave Pakistan on 224-4. Sohail took it up a notch adding 71 runs along with Imad Wasim for the fifth wicket.

Wasim made 23 before he was caught trying to whack Lungi Ngidi over the rope, and Sohail



Pakistan's Haris Sohail plays a shot during the 2019 ICC Cricket World Cup match against South Africa at Lord's in London yesterday. (AFP)

helped Pakistan past 300 before his innings ended when he was caught by Quinton de Kock off Ngidi in the final over.

WOEFUL START
 South Africa's chase got off to a woeful start as Hashim Amla was out lbw for two to Mohamed Amir in the second over and while De Kock and Du Plessis restored some order, they quickly fell behind the required run rate.

They added 87 runs for the second wicket before De Kock holed out in the deep on 47 off the bowling of Khan, who then bowled Markram for seven, leaving South Africa on 103 for 3 after 23.1 overs.

Their task became even harder when Du Plessis tried smash-

ing Amir out of the ground but only succeeded in lofting the ball straight up in the air to give wicket-keeper Sarfaraz Ahmed an easy catch and the bowler a 15th wicket of the tournament, the joint highest alongside England's Jofra Archer and Australia's Mitchell Starc.

A series of dropped or missed catches kept South African hopes briefly alive, but the wickets soon began to fall without a significant mark being left on the scoreboard.

Phehlukwayo (46 not out) hung around until the death, but starts were frittered away with regularity as Rassie van der Dussen (36), David Miller (31) and Chris Morris (16) came and went before the tail was mopped up in the final few overs.



South Africa's Faf du Plessis scored 63 yesterday. (Reuters)



Pakistan's Wahab Riaz (centre) celebrates a wicket with teammates Shadab Khan (left) and Mohamed Hafeez. (AFP)

Scorecard

PAKISTAN		SOUTH AFRICA	
Imam-ul-Haq c & b Tahir	44	H. Amla lbw b Amir	2
F. Zaman c Amla b Tahir	44	Q. de Kock c Imam b Khan	47
B. Azam c Ngidi b Phehlukwayo	69	F. du Plessis c Ahmed b Amir	63
M. Hafeez lbw b Markram	20	A. Markram b Khan	7
H. Sohail c De Kock b Ngidi	89	H. van der Dussen c Hafeez b Khan	36
I. Wasim c sub (Duminy) b Ngidi	23	D. Miller b Afridi	31
W. Riaz b Ngidi	4	A. Phehlukwayo not out	46
S. Ahmed not out	2		
S. Khan not out	1		
Extras (lb6, nb1, w5)	12		
Total (for seven wickets; 50 overs)	308		
Fall of wickets: 1-81 (Zaman), 2-98 (Imam), 3-143 (Hafeez), 4-224 (Azam), 5-295 (Wasim).			
		C. Morris b Riaz	16
		K. Rabada b Riaz	3
		L. Ngidi b Riaz	1
		I. Tahir not out	1
		Extras	1 (lb1, w5) 6
		Total (nine wickets; 50 overs)	259
		Fall of wickets: 1-4 (Amla), 2-91 (De Kock), 3-103 (Markram), 4-136 (Du Plessis), 5-189 (Van der Dussen), 6-192 (Miller), 7-222 (Morris), 8-239 (Rabada), 9-246 (Ngidi)	
		Bowling: Hafeez 2-0-11-0 (1w); Amir 10-1-49-2 (1w); Afridi 8-0-54-1; Wasim 10-0-48-0; Riaz 10-0-46-3 (2w); Khan 10-1-50-3 (1w)	
		RESULT: Pakistan won by 49 runs	



FOCUS

Rhodes warns Bangladesh of slow Southampton track

'We're not fearful... I'm really proud of Afghanistan's rise in the cricketing ranks'

Reuters
Southampton, United Kingdom

Bangladesh coach Steve Rhodes reckons the slow track and big outfield at the Hampshire Bowl may result in a boundary drought and has told his batsmen to run hard in today's World Cup match against Afghanistan.

Rhodes followed Saturday's match in which India survived a mighty scare against Afghanistan in a low-scoring thriller.

On a conspicuously slow wicket, India's vaunted line-up managed 224-8, while Afghanistan fell 11 runs short when they returned to chase.

Only Virat Kohli, who top-scored with 67, managed a 100-plus strike rate, while both teams managed only one six each.

"I watched bit of the game live and rest on TV. The wicket was a little bit slower and turned a little bit. We're playing on the same wicket, so that's useful to know," Rhodes said yesterday.

"The wicket is right in the middle of the ground and there are some huge boundaries. So six-hitting and four-hitting might be less, like the other day against India. We'll certainly have to run hard for our singles and twos, and turn them into threes. That's an important aspect."

The track might suit his bowlers though, the Englishman said.

Afghanistan bowled with lot of discipline against India. Leg-spinner Rashid Khan will be particularly pleased having bounced back from his mauling by England captain Eoin Morgan to return figures 10-0-38-1.

Rhodes said they respected the Afghan spinners but were not intimidated by them.

"I think the word is respect," Rhodes said.

"We do respect them but we don't fear them. A lot of the lads have grown up playing on spinning wickets, they faced a lot of spin bowlers. We'll respect them because they are top international bowlers."

Admiration is the other emotion he has for the plucky Afghans in their second World Cup appearance.

"We're not fearful of them, but



Bangladesh coach Steve Rhodes (centre) talks to his players during a training session in Southampton, United Kingdom, yesterday. (AFP)

Monday could be Afghanistan's day, says skipper Naib

Reuters
Southampton, United Kingdom

Afghanistan have improved significantly in their last two matches in the Cricket World Cup and it could be their day today when they take on Bangladesh in a group game at Hampshire Bowl, captain **Gulbadin Naib** said.

Afghanistan remain rooted to the bottom of the points table after six defeats in as many matches in their second World Cup appearance. They did not last their full 50 overs in their first four matches, a streak they finally snapped in their comprehensive defeat by



England on Tuesday. Naib's men, however, draw motivation from Saturday's narrow-miss against India when they fell 11 runs short of a major upset win over the two-time

champions. "I think we cannot take it easy against Bangladesh. They're a good side and they proved themselves in this stage," Naib told reporters yesterday. "But one thing about my team is that it's not an easy team. The first four or five games, we played very badly but we are improving day by day, and hopefully tomorrow will be our day."

Naib said his team struggled to adjust to English conditions where their spinners found little help from the tracks. "In the first three-four games, we struggled a lot. The surface and the wickets are totally different. We didn't expect it." Afghanistan have built their

bowling attack around their three frontline spinners, who came up with an improved performance in the match against India.

They will play Bangladesh, who have two wins from six matches, on the same slow track today.

"It's a very good wicket for us. It's like Asian conditions with the ball turning," Naib said. If the wicket offers some turn, Rashid Khan and his spin colleagues would be quite a handful against Bangladesh, Naib said. "Yesterday you saw it against India, who have probably the best batting attack.

"So if the wicket helps our spinners, it's very difficult for any team, not only Bangladesh."

interview, the ball came flying out of the net. He seems OK, he seems fine. The physio is checking him. There was no blood or anything like that," he said.

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COMMENT

Vettori lauds Kiwi bowlers for braving Brathwaite storm

AFP
Manchester, United Kingdom

Former captain Daniel Vettori has praised New Zealand for holding their nerve as West Indies batsman Carlos Brathwaite launched a blistering World Cup onslaught.

Brathwaite smashed 101 to take West Indies agonisingly close to victory at Old Trafford on Saturday but was caught by Trent Boult in the deep off the bowling of paceman Jimmy Neesham in the 49th over.

The West Indies were all out for 286, losing by just five runs.

"You're always rooting for your country to win but when you watch someone like Carlos Brathwaite play an innings like that, you can't help but admire what you see," Vettori wrote in his column for the International Cricket Council.

"A West Indies team is always exceptionally talented and they have so many match-winners."

"From a New Zealand perspective, for an innings like that to be needed was testament to the bowling," added Vettori.

Boult returned figures of 4-30 and was ably supported by fellow paceman Lockie Ferguson, who took three wickets.

"Trent Boult and Lockie Ferguson proved their worth with seven wickets between them. They put West Indies under pressure early on, particularly Boult, then backed it up in the middle," said Vettori.

"Ferguson's job is to get wickets and he's up to the task. He's got 14 in the tournament now and I really like his style of bowling."

Skipper Kane Williamson set up victory with his second successive World Cup century and a 160-run partnership with Ross Taylor that



New Zealand's Trent Boult took four wickets on Saturday. (AFP)

guided the Kiwis to 291-8.

"New Zealand know that those two are going to be brilliant and that they can rely on them more often than not," said Vettori.

"It's only a matter of time before Martin Guppitt and Tom Latham get going in their positions and then they can complement that with a Jimmy Neesham lower down."

All-rounder Neesham chipped in with a useful 28 off 23 balls at number six before bowling six overs for 35 runs and taking the final wicket of Brathwaite.

"In a topsy-turvy game like this, you always try to keep your cool and understand that if you make guys make tough decisions and put the percentages in your favour then you give yourself a chance of coming out on top," said Neesham.

"It was a chance for us to practise a pressure scenario and to come out on the right side is really pleasing."

Unbeaten New Zealand, runners up in 2015, top the World Cup table after six games.

India's Kohli fined for 'excessive appealing' against Afghanistan

AFP
Southampton, United Kingdom

India captain Virat Kohli has been fined 25 percent of his match fee for "excessive appealing" in a tense World Cup victory over Afghanistan, the International Council announced yesterday. The star batsman has also had one demerit point added to his disciplinary record after he was ruled to have approached experienced Pakistani umpire Aleem Dar in an aggressive manner when appealing an lbw decision during the 29th over of India's nail-biting 11-run win over rank outsiders Afghanistan at Southampton on Saturday.

Kohli was found to have breached Level 1 of the ICC code of conduct, with his offence relating to the clause concerning "excessive appealing during an international match". The India skipper admitted the offence and accepted the sanction proposed by match referee Chris Broad, the former England batsman. As such, there was no need for a formal hearing. Victory, sealed by a Mohamed Shami hat-trick, saw India remain on course to qualify for the semi-finals from the 10-team group stage but only after bottom of the table Afghanistan threatened to produce one of the all-time great upsets.

SPOTLIGHT

'Bittersweet' Brathwaite offers reminder of his explosive talent

By **Keybold**
GULFTIMES
24-06-2019



Reuters
Manchester, United Kingdom

West Indies all-rounder Carlos Brathwaite offered a reminder of his astonishing firepower with a knock of 101 off 82 balls that almost delivered one of the greatest World Cup comebacks.

After smashing West Indies to within six runs of victory over New Zealand, though, Brathwaite was caught by Trent Boult at deep mid-on going for glory with seven balls remaining.

"Obviously, I'm devastated not to get over the line," said the Barbadian. "I thought it had enough bat on it. I was willing it to go up and up and up but that was one of the best fielders in the world out there," Brathwaite added.

"It's a game of margins. One or two yards more, we would have been victorious tonight," he said.

An innings including five sixes and nine fours, including a devastating trio of sixes as part of 25 runs off Matt Henry in the 47th over, brought back memories of Brathwaite's famous innings which won the World Twenty20 in 2016 when he hit four sixes in a row off England's Ben Stokes in the final over.

Despite the lingering recollection of that feat, Brathwaite has yet to truly deliver with the bat in the ODI format having managed just one half-century in his previous 37 matches.



West Indies' Carlos Brathwaite (down) is consoled by New Zealand players after losing his wicket and the match on Saturday. (Reuters)

"For me personally, for my confidence, as a result of all the hard work I've been putting in it's finally good that it comes to fruition," he said. "Obviously, I know I can (do it), I never stopped working so it's good to see your hard work pay off. I am averaging 45 in test cricket so I think I can handle the bat a bit," he said.

"As it is a century in a losing cause it is bittersweet. I'm not going to beat myself up, because the ball should have gone for six and we should have won," he said.

His captain Jason Holder said

it would be wrong to criticise Brathwaite's decision to go for a big shot when a single would have given him the strike for the final over.

"We wouldn't have gone down to the penultimate if it wasn't for Carlos as well. He's been playing excellently well up to that point. It's just one of those things," Holder said.

"His work ethic is really good. He's not one to shy away from his responsibilities. And he puts in a really good effort into his preparation. The knock that he played today is not surprising to me," he said.

FOCUS

Goalkeeper's gaffe helps Brazil trounce Peru 5-0

'We knew we'd get there sooner or later because we worked very hard'



Brazil's Roberto Firmino celebrates with teammates after scoring the team's second goal against Peru at the Corinthians Arena in Sao Paulo yesterday.

AFP
Sao Paulo

Peru goalkeeper Pedro Gallese committed a horrendous error as Brazil ensured top spot in their Copa America group on Saturday with a 5-0 victory in Sao Paulo.

Goals from Casemiro, Roberto Firmino, Everton, Dani Alves and Willian ensured the Selecao would finish top of Group A and will play their quarter-final in Porto Alegre.

"We knew we'd get there sooner or later because we worked very hard," captain Alves told TV Globo.

"It's thanks to wins like this that we're connected with the fans. When we're all together, we feel the positive energy," he added, alluding to the jeers that greeted the team in their

first two group matches.

With Peru already 1-0 down, it was Gallese's dreadful error that led to Firmino's goal and swept the mat from under Peru's feet, with the game turning into a rout.

Darwin Machis scored a brace as Venezuela beat Bolivia 3-1 in Belo Horizonte and leapfrogged Peru into second place, securing a quarter-final at Rio de Janeiro's iconic Maracana stadium.

Peru, who finish third on four points, must now wait nervously to see what happens in the other two groups to find out if they will qualify for the knock-out rounds as one of the two best third-place finishers.

Never before since the Copa America adopted a 12-team format in 1993 with eight sides going through to the quarter-finals, has a side mustering four points failed to progress.

Hosts Brazil took an early

lead in scrappy fashion when Philippe Coutinho's corner was flicked on at the near post for Marquinhos to head goalwards from inside the six-yard box, with Gallese rooted to his line.

The ball came back off the post, grazed Marquinhos's shoulder and was then headed over the line by Casemiro on 12 minutes.

If Gallese was partly at fault there for not commanding his area, he was totally to blame for Brazil's second.

The goalkeeper dallied over a clearance and when he tried to hoof the ball upfield, it cannoned off a jumping Firmino, looped over his head and again came back off the post.

The ball bounced back to Firmino who waltzed around the stranded Gallese and slotted the ball into the empty net on 19 minutes.

Peru had barely been in the

game but captain Paolo Guerrero did curl a free-kick over the top. Yet the match was effectively over as a contest on 32 minutes when Everton cut in off the left flank and fired a snap effort into the bottom corner, with Gallese a touch slow to react and beaten at his near post.

With almost two thirds of the match to go, Peru were relying on a favour from Bolivia to hold onto second place in the group.

Brazil, who were boosted by a visit from the injured and absent Neymar on Friday, did not let up in the second half.

Alves was next in on the scoring act after playing a pair of one-tuos with Arthur and Firmino before firing across Gallese on 53 minutes.

Willian sealed the rout in the last minute with a stunning strike from the corner of the 18-yard box.

And there was still time for

Gallese to give away and then save a Gabriel Jesus penalty in stoppage time.

In Belo Horizonte, Venezuela were off to a dream start when Machis headed home a cross from Ronald Hernandez in the second minute.

Machis doubled Venezuela's lead on 58 minutes, converting a pass from Tomas Rincon.

But just after Jhon Chancellor missed the chance to extend Venezuela's lead when he hit the bar with a header, Leonel Justiniano pulled back a goal for Bolivia from outside the area.

Venezuela, though, were not to be denied and Josef Martinez flick home a header from Yeferson Soteldo's dinked cross to book their place in the knock-out stages.

"We dedicate this to the whole country, which is always keeping an eye on us," said Martinez.

PREVIEW

Uruguay and Chile set for high-stakes Copa America clash



Uruguay's Edinson Cavani during a training session yesterday.

AFP
Rio de Janeiro

Fireworks could be in store when reigning champions Chile and record 15-time winners Uruguay meet in the Copa America today at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana stadium.

It will be the fourth edition running of the oldest continental competition in international football in which the South American rivals meet and memories are still fresh of the controversy surrounding their stormy 2015 clash.

Uruguay, then the reigning champions, finished the quarter-final encounter in Santiago with nine men after Edinson Cavani and Jorge Fucile were given their marching orders in a 1-0 defeat.

Cavani's dismissal was the most controversial as he received a second yellow card just after the hour mark for flicking a hand into Chile defender Gonzalo Jara's face.

Cavani, though, was left incensed as Jara had appeared to shove a finger up the forward's backside prior to his reaction, and his misdemeanour went unpunished.

Uruguay defended doggedly after that but fell to a Mauricio Isla winner 10 minutes from time.

And tempers boiled over in the final minute when Fucile was given his marching orders, sparking a mass confrontation involving players and officials from both sides.

Cavani and Jara were both hit with two-game bans over the earlier incident while Uruguay coach Oscar Tabarez, who entered the field during the late melee, was suspended for three matches for insulting the referee.

It wasn't the first time that Jara had been involved in a controversial sexual assault on a Uruguay player.

In 2013, he and Luis Suarez had a running battle on the pitch in a World Cup qualifier that reached its zenith when Jara touched the Uruguay forward's testicles, and received a retaliatory punch for his troubles.

Jara may not be able to spark a ruckus this time around, though, as the 33-year-old is no longer a regular starter.

And Paris Saint-Germain forward Cavani has preferred to focus on the challenge ahead rather than past quarrels.

Claiming top spot in Group C is what's at stake, with Chile needing only a point to secure that, which would also be enough to ensure Uruguay's place in the quarter-finals.

"We know that Chile have a well drilled game plan, we've known it for a long time; they're well oiled," Cavani said on Saturday in Rio.

"We know what kind of rivals Chile are," he added.

Uruguay have a far better record than Chile in the teams' head-to-heads, winning 18 times to just seven in previous Copa America matches.

But Chile have won the last two, going on to lift the Copa America in both 2015 and 2016 – their only two continental triumphs.

Whoever wins the group will play either Peru or the third-placed finisher in Group B in the quarter-finals, and that could be Argentina.

But Cavani says potential future opponents will have no bearing on how either side approaches the match, particularly with Colombia awaiting the second-placed finishers.

"When you take to the field the only thing you want is to win," said the 32-year-old.

"It's after the match that you start looking at and studying the next match."

Both sides might be missing key players for the clash with full-back Diego Laxalt and midfielder Matias Vecino injured for Uruguay.

Chile, in the meantime, have doubts over their two main stars, Manchester United forward Alexis Sanchez and Barcelona midfielder Arturo Vidal.

In their all-time record, Uruguay have won 42 of 78 matches between the two sides, with 18 draws and as many Chile victories.

Many of those matches have been dirty affairs with fights amongst players, foul play and even punch-ups in the stands.

With what's at stake and recent history to boot, Monday's Maracana encounter could prove combustible.

BOTTOMLINE

Brazil skipper Alves leaves PSG

AFP
Paris

Just hours after scoring in Brazil's 5-0 thrashing of Peru at the Copa America, Dani Alves announced he was leaving Paris Saint-Germain.

The 36-year-old right back, who is captain of Brazil, had been with the French champions for two seasons and was at the end of his contract.

"Everything has a start, middle and end, and the time has come to put a full stop here," Alves said on Instagram.

Alves did not reveal where he might go, and leaves PSG as compatriot Leonardo returns as the new sporting director.

His departure also comes at a time when rumours are circulating about the future of Neymar, the world's most expensive footballer who has had an injury-hit season laced with controversy.

Alves signed for PSG at the same time as Neymar, in the summer of 2017.

The Juazeiro-born player, capped 111 times internationally,



Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian defender Dani Alves.

previously played club football for Bahia in Brazil, Sevilla and Barcelona in Spain and Juventus.

Alves' two seasons with PSG saw him part of a team that won back-to-back Ligue 1 titles as well as League Cup and French Cup trophies in his first year.

He also won the 2017 Serie A title with Juve, after having claimed six La Liga, four Copa del Rey and three Champions League winners' medals with Barca.

Further success on the European stage eluded him at PSG, however, with the Parisians crashing out of the Champions League at the round-of-16 stage in his two seasons.

"Today I close another cycle in my life, a cycle of victory, learning and experiences," maintained Alves.

"I would like to thank the PSG family for the opportunity to build together a page in the history of this club."

Alves added: "It was two years of resilience and continuous reinvention to fulfil my mission... I apologise if at any point I was not up to it on the pitch, I apologise if at some point I made a mistake, I just tried to give my best."

Venezuela have won respect, says goalscorer Martinez

Belo Horizonte, Brazil: Venezuela have gained the respect of the football world in qualifying for the Copa America quarter-finals with a 3-1 victory over Bolivia on Saturday, said forward Josef Martinez.

Following Tuesday's impressive goalless draw with hosts Brazil, Venezuela went into Saturday's clash in Belo Horizonte knowing victory would take them into the knock-out stages.

Darwin Machis scored twice and after Leonel Justiniano pulled a goal back, Martinez bagged the clincher to leave Venezuela unbeaten in the pool stages and second behind Brazil in Group A.

They will face the Group B runners-up – which could be Argentina – in the Maracana on Friday.

"We've won the respect of

everyone. We dedicate this to the whole country, which is always keeping an eye on us," said Martinez.

"Now we have to keep going," he added. "We're not thinking about who we'll play next, we're only thinking about ourselves."

The "Vinotinto" (red wine) team's progress is a welcome boost for crisis-wracked Venezuela. The South American country is in a fifth year of recession while President Nicolas Maduro and opposition leader Juan Guaido are embroiled in a struggle for control over the oil-rich but cash-starved nation.

Speaking before Saturday's match, forward Fernando Aristeguieta had spoken of the team's desire to unite a divided nation and bring "joy" to the people.

AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

Morocco gifted win as Namibia concede own goal

While Morocco enjoyed 60% possession during the opening 45 minutes in the sweltering Egyptian capital, they rarely troubled Namibia goalkeeper Loydt Kazapua



Morocco defender Medhi Benatia (L) vies for the header with Namibia forward Peter Shalulile during their Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) match in Cairo yesterday.

AFP
Cairo

Namibian Itamunua Keimuine headed an 89th-minute Hakim Ziyech free-kick into his own net to gift Morocco a 1-0 victory in the opening Africa Cup of Nations Group D match yesterday.

It was a cruel blow for the minnows from southern Africa, who lived up to their Brave Warriors nickname by taming the much-vaunted Atlas Lions.

Relief was etched on the face

of Morocco coach Herve Renard as the final whistle blew after an unconvincing start by one of the competition favourites.

Renard is the only coach to win the Cup of Nations with two countries, guiding outsiders Zambia and previous underachievers the Ivory Coast to success between 2012 and 2015.

As the match kicked off in 36 degree Celsius (97 Fahrenheit) heat at the Al Salam Stadium, the bookmakers, the FIFA rankings and Cup of Nations history favoured Morocco.

Morocco are 10/1 joint fifth favourites with bookmakers to

win the title, 43 years after the only time they lifted a trophy that symbolises African national supremacy.

The Atlas Lions lie 66 places above the Brave Warriors in the FIFA world rankings and they triumphed 5-1 on the previous occasion the countries met, 11 years ago.

However, while Morocco enjoyed 60% possession during the opening 45 minutes in the sweltering Egyptian capital, they rarely troubled Namibia goalkeeper Loydt Kazapua.

It was a defender, right-back Nabil Dirar, who came closest

to ending the stalemate with a fiercely struck 11th-minute shot from long range that flew just over the crossbar.

This was one of six goal attempts by the north Africans during the first half, but only two were on target, while both Namibian efforts went wide.

Namibia coach Ricardo Manteletti had warned his Group D opponents before the tournament that "even small dogs bite" and his side were a calm, well-organised outfit in the first half.

The second half was a replica of the first with Morocco pressing continuously and Namibia

defending with discipline and intelligence.

Renard introduced Sofiane Boufal, who played for Celta Vigo in La Liga last season on loan from Southampton, and Karim el Ahmadi in an effort to break the deadlock.

The French coach played his final card on 78 minutes, introducing Khalid Boutaib, a familiar figure to Egyptians as he plays for famed Cairo club Zamalek.

Ivory Coast face South Africa Monday at the same stadium in a Group D showdown of former Cup of Nations winners.

SPOTLIGHT

Retiring Spain star Torres eyes future coaching role

AFP
Tokyo

Spanish World Cup winner Fernando Torres said yesterday his body could no longer cope with the physical demands of football after announcing his retirement from the game.

But the 35-year-old, once one of the deadliest marksmen in the world, would not rule out a future in coaching.

The former Atletico Madrid, Liverpool and Chelsea striker finished his career at Japanese club Sagan Tosu after joining the J-League side last year.

"I have a high demand of myself - I always want to be honest and perform at the level I think I should," said Torres, who scored Spain's winning goal in the 2008 European championships and played a key role in their 2010 World Cup triumph.

"Knowing my body and listening to my body, I think, especially mentally, that time (when I can't perform at the top level) is not far and I wanted to end my career in a good way before that happens.

"I always gave everything I had and I still will give in the next two months," added Torres, whose last game will be against former Spain team mate Andres Iniesta's Vissel Kobe on August 23. Torres tweeted his retirement on Friday, saying: "After 18 exciting years, the time has

come to put an end to my football career."

He left Atletico last summer to play in Japan after returning to his boyhood club in 2015 but has struggled with form and injuries.

Torres, dubbed "El Nino" during his heyday, played 334 times in total for Atletico, scoring 111 goals.

He made 142 appearances for Liverpool, finding the net 81 times in his prime, before joining Chelsea where he scored 45 goals in 172 matches for the London club.

Asked about the future, Torres told a news conference in Tokyo he would continue in an advisory role for Sagan, likely identifying Spanish youth players for the Kyushu club.

He also did not rule out becoming a manager or coach back in Europe.

"I just need time to spend with my family and think about my next step - I don't know if it will be coaching or managing," said Torres, who named his former Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard as the best he had ever played alongside.

"I think I will study both things, and just wait for the call."

Torres also remains open to the idea of another emotional return to Atletico in the future, after earning his coaching badges.

"When I was a kid, I got a calling to become a football player," said Torres.



Sagan Tosu forward Fernando Torres (R) shakes hands with Minoru Takehara (L), president of the J-League football club Sagan Tosu, at the beginning of a press conference in Tokyo yesterday.

FOCUS

Brazil's six-year-old Messi who wants to meet his hero



Brazilian six-year-old Lionel Messi Maier poses in front of a banner depicting Argentine football star Lionel Messi in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

AFP
Porto Alegre, Brazil

Lionel Messi has played football since he was born but now he hopes to realise a dream: to meet his namesake and five-time Ballon d'Or winner.

The six-year-old from Alvorada, a suburb of Porto Alegre, is waiting at the gates of the Beira Rio stadium alongside his mother Lisiana Maier, hoping to speak to Barcelona and Argentina superstar Messi.

He's wearing a Barcelona shirt and boots with Messi's name stitched into them.

"His name is Lionel Messi. He loves football and really admires the way Lionel plays. We paid tribute to him by giving him this name," Maier told AFP.

The Maier family may not get another chance to introduce their son to his namesake.

"Since I play and my husband too, he was already playing with a ball from inside my tummy," said Maier.

The young Brazilian has "exceptional talent, he has Messi's calmness," but he's not left-footed like his idol.

Even so, his mother has coached him to use both feet, improving him as a player for his local club.

However, this was not to be a story with a happy ending for young Lionel Messi Maier.

Like the other Brazilian and Argentinian kids waiting to catch a glimpse of their hero, they were to leave disappointed. And the Maier family was not able to see him live on Sunday either, during the Copa America Group B encounter at the Beira Rio stadium.

Match tickets are so expensive that the family had to choose between "eating or going to the match."

WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

England ease into quarters as Cameroon fume over VAR

AFP
Valenciennes, France

Captain Steph Houghton set England on their way to the quarter-finals of the women's World Cup yesterday with a 3-0 win over a Cameroon side who were left furious with several refereeing decisions and at one point appeared ready to walk off the pitch.

Houghton, Ellen White and Alex Greenwood scored the goals for England in a bad-tempered encounter watched by more than 20,000 fans in Valenciennes, and Phil Neville's side go through to a quarter-final against Norway on Thursday.

However, this match will be best remembered for Cameroon's protests to the Chinese referee as they went out in the last 16 for the second successive World Cup, and African interest in France came to an end.

They were left with a sense of injustice at the manner in which England's opening goal came about in the 14th minute, and their anger reached boiling point when White's goal to make it 2-0 in first-half stoppage time was initially disallowed for offside before being awarded after ref-



England's Steph Houghton celebrates scoring their first goal with Toni Duggan, Ellen White and Alex Greenwood.

eree Qin Liang consulted with the Video Assistant Referee.

Their players surrounded the referee, pointing to the big screen replays of the goal and seemingly threatening to walk off the pitch.

Coach Alain Djeumfa persuaded them to carry on, but expressed his rage as he turned to the television cameras and ap-

peared to shout: "It's a shame, what is this?!" Further confusion came just three minutes after the restart when Cameroon thought they had pulled a goal back to make it 2-1, but Ajara Nchout's effort was eventually disallowed for offside after the referee had again consulted with the VAR.

The Indomitable Lionesses carried on but were outclassed by an England side who will nevertheless need to improve considerably from this performance if they are to win the World Cup.

Their early opener on a sticky evening at the Stade du Hainaut came after Cameroon goalkeeper Annette Ngo Ndom picked up what was adjudged to have been

a backpass by Augustine Ejangué, although it looked to be nothing more than a poor piece of control from the defender. Toni Duggan laid off the free-kick barely six yards out for Houghton to fire in, despite Cameroon placing every single player behind the ball.

England were laborious but increased their advantage through that controversial second goal right on half-time, with Lucy Bronze doing excellently to set up White, who fired in on her left foot for her fourth goal of the World Cup.

White was in line with the last defender when the pass was played, and the decision to let the goal stand was the correct one.

The next flashpoint came just after the restart as Nchout scored from Gabrielle Aboudi Onguene's low ball into the box, but again VAR overturned the decision, this time disallowing the goal for offside.

Again it was the right decision, but again the Cameroon players protested vehemently. Neville approached Djeumfa to try to help calm his opposite number down, and play again eventually resumed.

England then wrapped up their victory when Duggan's low corner from the left was swept home first-time by Greenwood in the

MLB

Yankees slug past Astros for eighth straight victory

Yankees homered for the 25th straight game, tying the team record set from June 1 to 29 in 1941

Reuters
New York

Giancarlo Stanton drove in his first four runs of the season on a pair of two-run singles as the host New York Yankees extended their season-high winning streak to eight games with a 7-5 victory over the Houston Astros on Saturday night. The Yankees picked up their latest win on a night when they blew a pair of two-run leads and homered for the 25th straight game, tying the team record set from June 1-29, 1941. New York is two shy of the all-time record set by the Texas Rangers from Aug. 11-Sept. 9, 2002, and became the seventh team to homer in 25 straight games.

In the bottom of the seventh, Austin Romine forged a 5-5 tie with a solo homer into the right field seats off Ryan Pressly (1-1). It came after Jonathan Holder (5-2), in relief of Yankees starter Masahiro Tanaka, allowed a two-strike, two-out, three-run homer to Yordan Alvarez in the top of the seventh.

DJ LeMahieu followed Romine's second homer of the season by reaching on an infield hit, and Aaron Judge reached on catcher's interference. After the runners moved up a base on Luke Voit's groundout, Stanton hit a 107mph ground ball to third base that deflected into left field off third baseman Yuli Gurriel as he attempted to make a diving stop, bringing home LeMahieu and Judge.

GIANTS 7, DIAMONDBACKS 4

Five relievers combined to shut out the Arizona Diamondbacks on two hits over the final five innings, allowing the San Francisco Giants to hold on for a victory over their National League West rival in Phoenix.

Alex Dickerson, who drove in six runs in his Giants debut in Friday's 11-5 win, tormented the Diamondbacks again, this time with two doubles that combined to drive in three runs. The Giants overcame a 3-0 deficit and led 5-4 when manager Bruce Bochy pulled starter Tyler Beebe in favour of Trevor Gott (4-0) after Arizona's David Peralta led off the fifth inning with a double.

DODGERS 5, ROCKIES 4

Alex Verdugo had four hits and hit two home runs, including the walk-off blast, as Los Angeles rallied to defeat visiting Colorado in a near mirror-image of Friday's series opener. One day after rookie Matt Beatty ended a victory on a ninth-inning homer, it was another Dodgers rookie to rip his first game-ending home run.

Verdugo's second home run of the



New York Yankees left fielder Giancarlo Stanton follows through on a two run infield single against the Houston Astros during the MLB match at Yankee Stadium in New York on Saturday night. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

game was his seventh of the season. Raimel Tapia hit a home run and rookie starter Peter Lambert pitched five solid innings in his fourth career outing but the Rockies dropped to 0-5 against the Dodgers this season and lost on consecutive days following a successful three-game sweep at Arizona.

TWINS 5, ROYALS 3

Minnesota scored twice in the top of the 10th inning to defeat host Kansas City as Luis Arraez led off the inning with a single and moved to second when Jake Cave was hit by a pitch. After Jorge Polanco fled to left, CJ Cron's ground ball eluded Hunter Dozier at third to score Arraez.

Nelson Cruz struck out, but Eddie Rosario's double scored Cave to give the

Twins an insurance run. Trevor May (2-1) pitched the ninth and picked up the win for the Twins. Wily Peralta (2-3) took the loss for the Royals. Blake Parker picked up his 10th save in 11 chances. Miguel Sano led off the second inning with a 454-foot bomb to center for his ninth home run of the season.

He has more home runs (12) and RBIs (43) against the Royals than he does against any other major league team. Cave led off the eighth inning for the Twins with his first home run of the season, a 437-foot shot to right center. One out later, Cron planted one in the left field bullpen.

BLUE JAYS 8, RED SOX 7

Boston reliever Ryan Brasier walked Eric Sogard and Vladimir Guerrero Jr.

with the bases loaded to force in two runs — including the go-ahead run — in a three-run eighth inning and visiting Toronto came back to win.

Freddy Galvis and Rowdy Tellez homered for the Blue Jays, who overcame a 6-0 deficit and scored four runs in the seventh to close the gap to one. Christian Vazquez homered for Boston.

The Blue Jays tied the game in the eighth against Matt Barnes (3-2) on an infield single by Teoscar Hernandez, who took second on a wild pitch and scored on Cavan Biggio's single. Barnes walked the next two batters to load the bases and was replaced by Brasier, who walked Sogard and Guerrero to give Toronto a two-run lead. Nick Kingham (3-1) struck out three and walked one in two innings to earn the win.

CARDINALS 4, ANGELS 2

Albert Pujols provided one of the few highlights for visiting Los Angeles in a loss to St. Louis, but his home run and the standing ovations every time he came to the plate, were memorable for many who previously watched him win two World Series titles and three National League Most Valuable Player awards with the Cardinals.

Pujols played 11 seasons in St. Louis before signing with the Angels following the 2011 season. This series is his first trip back. The home run by Pujols was the lone blemish against St. Louis right-hander Dakota Hudson (6-3).

He went seven innings, allowing one run and five hits for his eighth consecutive quality start. Marcell Ozuna homered against the Angels for the second straight game, a two-run blast into the third deck in the sixth, stretching the lead to 4-0.

BRAVES 13, NATIONALS 9

Freddie Freeman had two hits and drove in five runs and Dansby Swanson lashed out two hits with four RBIs, including a key three-run homer, as Atlanta stormed back to beat host Washington in Washington DC.

The Braves, who trailed 8-4, have won 12 of their last 15 games. Washington was trying to reach the 500 mark for the first time since April 23, but its bullpen gave up nine runs, including three by Trevor Rosenthal in the seventh when he failed to retire a batter.

Washington, which had won a season-high five straight games, led 8-4 before the Braves scored four in the seventh and four in the eighth. Juan Soto was 3-for-4 with four RBIs for the Nationals.

BREWERS 6, REDS 5

Milwaukee's Yasmani Grandal homered and had two RBIs as the Brewers broke their five-game losing streak with a win over visiting Cincinnati after Grandal had a solo homer, double, two runs scored and a walk in a 2-for-3 day batting from the leadoff spot.

Mike Moustakas went 2-for-4 with a double and a run. Christian Yelich was 0-for-3 and had his 18-game hitting streak broken. Reliever Matt Albers (4-2) collected the win with 1 1/3 innings of hitless relief.

Lefty closer Josh Hader recorded six straight outs to notch his 18th save in 19 chances, striking out four.

ATHLETICS 4, RAYS 2

Matt Chapman highlighted a two-run seventh inning with a tie-breaking double, sending Oakland to victory over visiting Tampa Bay, the A's fourth in six games against the Rays over the past two weeks.

After twice seeing one-run leads disappear, the A's took charge for good in the seventh, when Beau Taylor drew a leadoff walk from Rays reliever Diego Castillo (1-6). After a single by Marcus Semien, Chapman laced his go-ahead double to center, scoring pinch runner Josh Phegley.

The Rays chose to load the bases by intentionally walking Matt Olson, but after Castillo got Khris Davis to hit into a fielder's choice with the out at home, he hit Ramon Laureano with a full-count pitch, allowing the inning's second run to score.

INDIANS 2, TIGERS 0

Rookie Aaron Civale (1-0) scattered two hits and struck out six over six innings in his major league debut as host Cleveland beat Detroit after Jose Ramirez ripped an RBI triple in the second inning and rookie Oscar Mercado had an RBI single in the third.

The Indians have won seven of their last nine overall and moved a season-high six games over .500. They outscored Detroit by a 34-12 margin over the past nine days to win each of the five games. JaCoby Jones and Niko Goodrum each collected two of the six hits for the Tigers, who have surrendered 53 runs while losing seven of their last eight games.

RANGERS 6, WHITE SOX 5

Nomar Mazara homered twice and Lance Lynn pitched resiliently after a shaky first inning to help host Texas beat Chicago in Arlington, Texas. Mazara connected against White Sox starter Odrisamer Despaigne for both homers.

He also drilled a towering home run estimated at 505 feet in Friday's series opener. Lynn (9-4) went seven innings, allowing five runs and six hits, with six strikeouts and one walk.

After allowing four runs in the first inning, the right-hander settled down and retired 13 in a row during one stretch. Lynn is 7-2 in his past 11 starts.

White Sox shortstop Tim Anderson went 3-for-4 with a home run, a double and a career-high-tying four RBIs. Anderson highlighted Chicago's first inning outburst with a two-out, bases-clearing double and scored on Yolmer Sanchez's double one batter later.

METS 10, CUBS 2

Pete Alonso, Todd Frazier and Wilson Ramos homered, Zack Wheeler pitched seven strong innings, and New York cruised over host Chicago as the Mets scored in each of the first six innings and came within one run of matching their season high in an exciting match on Saturday night.

NHL DRAFT

US players continue to have impact

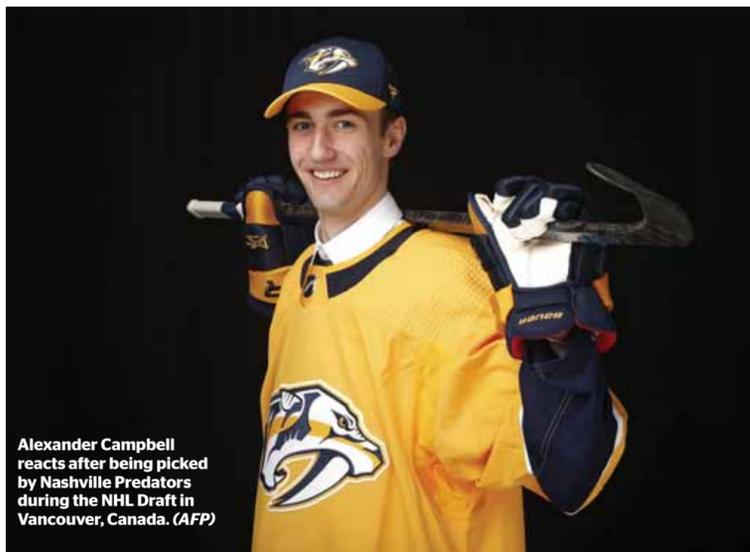
Reuters
Vancouver

The United States National Development Team continued its record-setting success on Day 2 of the NHL Draft on Saturday. Nine more players from the US-NDT were selected on Day 2 of the draft held in Vancouver, setting a record of 17 players total taken over the two days.

The previous record was 13, a mark set in 2006 and 2007. Led by No. 1 overall pick Jack Hughes, an 18-year-old who was selected by the New Jersey Devils, the US-NDT had eight players picked in the first round — the most first-rounders ever selected from one team.

Alex Vlasic was the first of nine selected Saturday, taken at No. 43 of the second round by the Chicago Blackhawks. Defenceman Drew Helleson went to the Colorado Avalanche at No. 47. "We had a ton of success this past year with our team and that definitely contributes to it," Vlasic said. "We had an incredible amount of talented players on our team and we're all so close. I think that's why we did so well this year."

Three defencemen — Domenick Fensore, Henry Thrun, and Case McCarthy — would go next. "From what I saw, the way they really are teammates and friends first and foremost, and they push each other" USA Hockey executive director Pat



Alexander Campbell reacts after being picked by Nashville Predators during the NHL Draft in Vancouver, Canada. (AFP)

Kelleher said. "They push each other in a great competitive way and in a great environment. They genuinely care for each other and want to see each other get better."

Overall, 59 Americans were selected over the seven rounds of the draft. Meanwhile, for the first time in 33 years, no players from the Ontario Hockey League went in the top 10.

The OHL ended up with 25 players taken, down from 35 last year. The first to hear his named

called Saturday was forward Arthur Kaliyev, selected at No. 33 by the Los Angeles Kings, the second pick of Saturday.

Kaliyev had expected to be drafted in the first round. "It was hard (Friday), but I think I'm just going to try to prove those teams made a mistake and try to be the best that I can," said Kaliyev, who had 102 points (51 goals, 51 assists) in 67 games with Hamilton of the OHL.

The Carolina Hurricanes made 11 picks on Saturday, tota-

ling an NHL-high 12 selections overall.

"The more swings you get, the more chances you have at getting some hits," Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell said. Jeremy Michel was chosen with the 217th and final pick on Saturday by the St. Louis Blues.

SUBBAN AND MARLEAU DEALT IN SEPARATE SALARY DUMPS

A pair of three-time all stars, Patrick Subban and Patrick Marleau

were traded in separate deals on Saturday that will provide their former teams with extra salary cap space to go after free agents.

The Nashville Predators traded 30-year-old defenceman Subban to the New Jersey Devils for two players and two draft picks. The Toronto Maple Leafs dealt veteran centre Marleau to the Carolina Hurricanes for a sixth-round pick in 2020. Carolina also gets a future first round pick and a future seventh round pick.

The Predators received defencemen Steven Santini and Jeremy Davies plus a second-round and a sixth round draft pick. A former Norris Trophy winner as the league's top defenceman and three-time All-Star, Subban scored nine goals and 22 assists in 63 games during his third season with Nashville in 2018-19.

In 645 career games, Subban has 310 assists and 408 points with the Montreal Canadiens and Predators. He has three years remaining on an eight-year, \$72 million contract he signed in 2014. The move is expected to free up about \$9 million in salary cap space for Nashville.

Marleau is part of the league's elite 500 goal club, scoring 551 career goals in 1,657 NHL games. He finished with 16 goals and 37 points for Toronto last season.

A three-time all star and a former second-overall draft pick in 1997, Marleau signed as a free agent with Toronto in 2017.

FOCUS

Ortiz out of ICU, in good condition



Reuters
Boston

Retired Boston Red Sox star David Ortiz has been moved out of intensive care and was in good condition, his wife said in a statement on Saturday, nearly two weeks after he was shot in the Dominican Republic and moved to a Boston hospital.

"David was moved out of the intensive care unit at Massachusetts General Hospital. He remains in good condition and continues to recover under the care of Drs David King and Larry Rondon," Tiffany Ortiz said in a statement issued by the Red Sox.

The bullet entered his back and exited through his abdomen, Ortiz's father told reporters. Conflicting media reports have offered varying details about which internal organs were dam-

aged. Ortiz, well known as "Big Papi," was shot while seated at an open-air nightclub in the capital of his native country.

Dominican authorities have since concluded that Ortiz was not the target of the attack and the shooter meant to kill somebody else — a friend of Ortiz, identified as Sixto David Fernandez. Television host Jhoel Lopez was also wounded in the shooting.

Several arrests have been made in the case. Ortiz, 43, is widely revered in Boston for helping the Red Sox win three World Series championships, including the memorable 2004 title that broke an 86-year drought for the club.

He retired after the 2016 season while still one of the best hitters in the game, making the Major League Baseball All-Star team that season while leading the league in several statistical categories.

SPOTLIGHT

Paris aims to beat Olympic traffic with flying taxis

Arrivals in Paris face an hour-long haul by train or bus into town from airport

AFP
Le Bourget, France

Paris aims to give visitors to the 2024 Paris Olympics a flying start by offering airborne taxis to tournament sites straight from the airport. Arrivals in the City of Light currently face an hour-long haul by train or bus into town from Charles de Gaulle airport to the north of Paris.

But if Aeroports de Paris (ADP), Airbus and the RATP regional transport have their way passengers, right after their jets have taxied to a halt on the runway, will be able to take to the air once again with a self-flying urban taxi of the future.

The firms used this past week's Paris Air Show to say the Olympics afforded the perfect opportunity to bring into service futuristic Vertical Take-off and Landing (VTOL) machines, and that they would launch a feasibility study.

"In 2010, for the first time, more than half of humanity was living in urban zones and we think we shall surpass 60% by 2030," said Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury. "The time had now come to vault up to 'the third dimension' of local commutes — air, he said. "If we have the conviction that in the next five, 10, 15, 20 or 30 years low altitude is a space to be conquered we have to put in place the conditions today," said ADP Group's executive director general Edward Arkwright.

VTOL converts are already sprouting in number as the world looks to move beyond — or rather, above — today's saturated motorways and growing environmental concerns. Back on the ground, the view has been muddied by a delay beyond the Games, to 2025, of the express fast train designed to cut congestion and travel time between Charles de Gaulle airport and the city centre.

For aircraft manufacturer Airbus, airport manager ADP and RATP, which manages Parisian public transport services, the Games are a chance to showcase French savoir-faire in urban mobility.

ADP has until the end of the year to choose a site for a "Vertiport" capable of hosting taxis from one of 10 aerodromes in the region around Paris. The idea is to have the venue ready in 18 months, requiring infrastructure investment of some 10mn euros (\$11.3mn), says Arkwright. He adds the project will test out the link "via an existing helicopter corridor".



A participant takes part in an event at Place de la Concorde, which was turned into a giant Olympic park as Paris celebrated Olympic Day 2019 on Friday. (Reuters)

Ideally, the service would see the taxis take off every six minutes. In order to make VTOL a reality by 2024, ADP is working alongside Airbus, which has for some years been involved in full electric propulsion urban mobility schemes. The manufacturer already has two prototype models — the single-seater "Vahana" and the four-seater variant "CityAirbus".

Faury explained that "the two projects will converge towards a vehicle that will respond to first cases of use." "This partnership is a unique opportunity to develop technological solutions, a product, a regulatory framework, an economic model," Faury added.

"This project reduces constraints not only in terms of infrastructure but also concerning air traffic as it involves experimenting in a specific (air) corridor," said Jean-Louis Rassineux, head of aeronautics and defence issues for Deloitte.

"It is large scale rollout which is going to be complicated," Rassineux said. Along with required progress on battery power and anti-collision detection he said there were "constraints regarding compatibility and traffic regulation."

But there is also the issue of the extent to which the concept will gain widespread public acceptance. Rassineux warned there would need to be "security levels as

stringent as those for air traffic" as well as "real value added to existing transport" systems. Deloitte estimates the size of the airborne taxi market at some \$17bn for the United States alone through to 2040. Yet "there remains some way to go before a flying vehicle becomes integrated into urban transport," cautioned France's transport minister, Elisabeth Borne.

Borne nonetheless sees moves towards creating an embryonic service in time for the 2024 games as "one of the important stages" towards "the emergence of a complete transport offering" which would be "integrated and which respects the environment".

NBA

Cauley-Stein wants out of Sacramento

Reuters
Los Angeles

With young, talented players at multiple positions and the Western Conference in a state of flux, the Sacramento Kings are being pegged by some as a potential surprise team in the 2019-20 season. But one of their most vital players apparently doesn't want to stick around to see just how good the team can become.

Speaking to The Sacramento Bee on Saturday night, Roger Montgomery, the agent for Willie Cauley-Stein, said his client no longer wants to play for the team with which he has spent the first four seasons of his career.

"I really think Willie needs a fresh start," Montgomery said. "Based on how things have gone for him there in Sacramento, I just think it's time for Willie to move on, and we'd really like him to move on."

Cauley-Stein, 25, was drafted sixth overall in 2015 and played out his rookie contract this past season. He is now headed for free agency, the only catch being that if the Kings extend Cauley-Stein a qualifying offer, he would become a restricted free agent.

That would give the Kings the opportunity to match any offer another team makes. That is something Montgomery is hoping doesn't happen. "We've kind of hoped that things would change over the years and Willie would get a chance to expand his game, get a chance to get some consistency there in terms of the roster turnover and the coaching turnover and the things that have not been steady there," Montgomery told The Bee. "That being said, I'm hopeful they will not even give Willie his qualifying offer so Willie can be an un-

restricted free agent."

Per league rules, the deadline to extend the qualifying offer to Cauley-Stein is June 30, and the offer would be for \$6,265,631. Should the club indeed make him the offer, Cauley-Stein would only be allowed to sign an offer sheet with another team, and the Kings would then have 72 hours to match.

"Willie is a great player who has shown he can fit our style of play," the Kings said later Saturday night through a statement to The Bee. "Beyond that, we can't comment further."

In four seasons, Cauley-Stein has averaged 10.1 points, 6.4 rebounds and 1.6 assists in 295 games (199 starts). He played in 81 games last season, starting all of them. Over the last two seasons, he has averaged 12.3 points, 7.7 rebounds and 2.4 assists.

He has also seen his average minutes increase to 27.6 over the last two seasons, after averaging 20.1 minutes in his first two seasons. His increased role with the team has coincided with an increase in the team's talent, particularly with younger players.

Second-year point guard De'Aaron Fox is up for the NBA's Most Improved Player Award. Rookie Marvin Bagley III was named to the All-Rookie first team, a distinction teammate Buddy Hield earned in the 2016-17 season.

While the Los Angeles Lakers will add Anthony Davis via a trade with the New Orleans Pelicans, injuries to players such as Kevin Durant and Klay Thompson of Golden State; reported friction in Houston's locker room; and big-name free agents such as Durant, Thompson, Kyrie Irving and Kawhi Leonard on the market, the Western Conference appears as wide open as it has been in half a decade or more.



Sacramento Kings' Willie Cauley-Stein

FOCUS

IOC inaugurates new headquarters as 2026 Games vote looms

Reuters
Lausanne, Switzerland

The International Olympic Committee inaugurated its new headquarters in Lausanne yesterday, the 125th anniversary of the organisation which is preparing to select the host city for the 2026 Winter Olympics.

Built at a cost of about 130mn euros (\$147.76mn), the modern glass and steel structure has a solar-panelled roof and was constructed in the place of the old headquarters on the shores of Lake Geneva.

"On this very day... Pierre de Coubertin founded the International Olympic Committee and revived the Olympic Games," IOC President Thomas Bach said. "He saw this as a way to promote peace among nations and people," the German told an audience of IOC members, international federations and representatives of the 206 national Olympic Committees. "This Olympic House, which we are inaugurating today, is a reflection of this mission and of our values."

According to the IOC, the new building, designed by Danish architects 3XN and inspired by the shape of a dove with a large central staircase made of five rings, meets stringent environmental and sustainability standards.

It will house all 500 IOC em-



Guests sit under a tent during the inauguration ceremony of the Olympic House, the new International Olympic Committee headquarters, in Lausanne, Switzerland on Sunday. (Reuters)

ployees under one roof instead of several locations around Lausanne as was the case in the past. "Of course, we wanted to bring together everyone, the Olympic family and all IOC staff, under one roof," Bach said. "At the same time, we want the Olympic House to incorporate the elements of sustainability, credibility and youth. The building reflects these three elements that

are so central to our mission."

After yesterday's festivities it is back to business today when the IOC will elect the host city for the 2026 Winter Games with Italy's Milan and Stockholm the only candidates in the race. Four others — Swiss city Sion, Japan's Sapporo, Austria's Graz and 1988 hosts Calgary in Canada — dropped out in mid-race, scared off by the size and cost of the

Games. About 100 members are expected to vote at the IOC session today afternoon with both Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and his Swedish counterpart Stefan Lovven in town to support their respective candidates. Italy last hosted winter Olympics in Turin in 2006 while winter sports powerhouse Sweden has never hosted the Winter Games.

ATHLETICS

Gayle targets world title after winning long jump at trials

Reuters
Kingston

Tajay Gayle leapt 8.24 metres to win the men's long jump at the Jamaican trials on Saturday. Gayle, who is aiming to end Jamaica's 16-year wait for a long jump medal at the world championships, said: "It's a great feeling that I'll finally get to represent my country at the world championship."

"In Doha, I'll definitely try my best to secure a medal and join James Beckford, who won silver medals in 2003 and 1995," added Gayle, who had four jumps over 8m on the night. "I'm just trying to stay healthy, keep fit and see what happens in the next few months with the guidance of coach Stephen Francis."

In the men's discus, Traves Smikle threw 66.33m to defeat Commonwealth Games champion and training partner Fedrick Dacres (63.49m). "I'm not particularly happy with the performance, but having the national title is good... the last time I won it was 2012, so to win it in 2019 is a good feeling... It's just another step to what really matters, which is the world championships," Smikle said.

Dacres, who recently threw a world leading 70.78m in Monaco, was pleased to have secured his berth at Doha and



Traves Smikle threw 66.33m to defeat Commonwealth Games champion Fedrick Dacres to win the men's discus.

is now targeting consistency. "I've made the team, so now it is about preparing for the championships."

It's about trying to be at a level where I'm always in the hunt for a podium finish," Dacres said. Danniell Thomas-Dodd won the women's shot put in 18.52m to secure her spot at the Sept. 28 to Oct. 6 world championships in Qatar. Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Natoya Goule returned a season best one minute, 59.50 seconds to win her seventh national 800m crown.

The 100m champions from Friday night remained on course for the double after qualifying from the 200m semi-finals on Saturday. Yohan Blake, the men's 100m champion, was an easy winner in his semi-final heat, running 20.42 seconds.

Rasheed Dwyer, who was third in the 100m on Friday, also won his heat in 20.33 seconds while Julian Forte ran 20.54 sec-

onds to advance. Anel Miller ran a personal best 20.57 seconds to book his spot.

Women's 100m champion Elaine Thompson and runner up Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce both won their semi-final heats to qualify for Sunday's final of the 200m.

With world champion Omar McLeod using his wild card for the upcoming Doha World Championships, the men's 110m hurdles promises to be an exciting final after three men all ran 13.66 seconds in the semi-finals on Saturday.

World and Olympic Games medallist Hansle Parchment won the second heat with 13.66 seconds, Commonwealth Games champion Ronald Levy won the first heat with a 13.66 and Orlando Bennett won the third heat with a 13.66.

Olympic Games medallist Shericka Jackson ran a 50.69 seconds in the semi-finals to lead the women's 400m.

FOCUS

Federer targets Wimbledon after winning 10th Halle title

'It's unbelievable. I never thought when I first played here that I would win 10 titles'



Roger Federer of Switzerland poses with the trophy after beating David Goffin of Belgium in Halle yesterday.

AFP
Halle Westfalen, Germany

Roger Federer said he was ready for Wimbledon after waltzing past Belgium's David Goffin in straight sets to win a record-extending 10th title at the ATP event in Halle yesterday.

Federer, 37, beat Goffin 7-6 (7/2), 6-1 to secure his 102nd career singles title and remain unbeaten on grass so far this season.

"It's unbelievable. I never thought when I first played here that I would win 10 titles," said Federer.

"Often when it went well for me here, I also had successful Wimbledon, so this sets me up nicely."

The Swiss star is chasing a ninth Wimbledon crown in London next month as he looks to extend and defend his record of 20 career majors. Long-term rival Rafael Nadal moved to within just two titles of Federer's record with his 12th French Open triumph earlier this month, while world number one Novak Djokovic is just five short with 15 career majors. The win at Halle means that Federer will be second seed ahead of Nadal at the All-England Club, and the Swiss said that his performances at the tournament would boost his confidence.

'Not easy to dominate' – Federer feels for young generation

Halle Westfalen: Roger Federer expressed sympathy for the younger generation of tennis players yesterday, saying that their successes outside of the Grand Slams were being overlooked.

Federer, 37, won the ATP tournament in Halle for a record-stretching 10th time yesterday, notching up his 102nd career singles title.

He was one of two 37-year-olds to be playing in an ATP final on the same day, with veteran Spaniard Feliciano Lopez also in the singles final at Queen's. Federer admitted that the continuing success of older players such as himself, Rafael

Nadal and Novak Djokovic had left little elbow room for the younger generation.

"As long as me, Rafa and Novak are around it is not going to be easy for a young guy to come up and dominate," he said.

"Maybe it would be good for the sport if they did, I don't know. People seem to like it as it is."

Yet Federer insisted that the success of players such as Stefanos Tsitsipas, Borna Coric and Karen Khachanov should not be overlooked.

Coric, 22, beat Federer in the Halle final last year, while 23-year-old Khachanov broke into the top 10 this year after

beating Djokovic in straight sets in the final of the Paris Masters last November.

Federer argued that such triumphs were not being given enough recognition, and were being drowned out by the overwhelming focus on the four majors.

"I think there is too much focus on the Grand Slams these days which isn't fair," said Federer.

"In my day, it was a huge success to win your first Masters 1000 tournament and break into the top 10."

"Khachanov beat Djokovic in the Paris final as well. It's not like he beat any old tourist"

"It's always good at my age to prove myself that I can last five matches in six days and tough ones along the way," he said.

Federer endured a rough ride in the early rounds in Halle, battling to hard-fought, three-set victories over Jo-Wilfried Tsonga and Roberto Bautista Agut.

Things got easier in the latter stages as he thrashed Andy Murray's new doubles partner Pierre-Hugues Herbert in the semi-finals before dispatching Goffin on Sun-

day. Federer held off three break points early in the first set before prevailing in the tiebreaker.

An unsettled looking Goffin then gifted Federer the opening game of the second set with a double fault on break point. From there, the Swiss never looked back, breaking Goffin twice more on his way to a 10th Halle title. "I thought David was actually better than me in the first 10 games," said Federer.

Goffin added: "I thought I started really well, there was great in-

tensity in the first set.

"I had opportunities, but you have to take them against Roger. This guy is pretty good."

It is the first time Federer has reached double figures at any individual tournament.

He has triumphed eight times at both Wimbledon and the Dubai Open, and has won his home tournament in Basel on nine occasions.

"I've never won a tournament 10 times before, so I will remember forever that I did so here in Halle."

Lopez beats Simon in thriller for Queen's crown

Reuters
London

Spanish veteran Feliciano Lopez won the Queen's Club grass-court title for the second time in three editions as he outlasted Frenchman Gilles Simon 6-2 6-7(4) 7-6(2) in an absorbing and high-quality final yesterday.

With Simon aged 34 it was one of the oldest Queen's finals but the two veterans served up a classic for the packed crowd.

Wildcard Lopez, whose ranking has slipped to 113, wasted a match point in the 12th game of the contest but a sensational volley put him in 5-2 ahead in the deciding tiebreak and he made no mistake at the second time of asking.

Simon netted a volley at 2-6 and Lopez could celebrate his first title since winning the prestigious Queen's crown in 2017.

"I thought the best moment of my career was in 2017 but it was not, it's right now," Lopez

said before making a moving tribute to his watching wife-to-be Sandra Gago.

"She might have heard of this leftie Spanish player but I've not won many matches since we met."

"Now I can say to her I'm a decent player."

Both players appeared to be running on fumes towards the end but there was no rest for Lopez who was due back on court about 30 minutes later as co-star to British favourite Andy Murray in the men's doubles final.

World number 38 Simon had spent 12 sets and nearly 11 hours on court to reach his first final on grass since losing to Lopez at Eastbourne in 2013.

He looked flat as he dropped serve twice to lose the opener but his metronomic groundstrokes began to punch some holes in Lopez's game and he dragged the second set into a tiebreak.

Lopez moved 4-2 ahead but Simon crunched a superb backhand winner to close the gap and then chased down a

drop shot to pass the Spaniard at the net as he swung the breaker his way.

A tense third set saw both players fail to convert a flurry of early break points but Lopez pressed hard with Simon serving at 5-6 when a punishing forehand return brought up match point.

He snatched a forehand into the net though and Simon held after 12 minutes to set up a tie-break climax.

Simon, bidding to become the first Frenchman to win the title in the professional era, served his first double-fault of the match at 2-3 and then watched in disbelief as Lopez picked off his dipping backhand pass with a lunging volley. There was to be no stopping Lopez then as he became the first wildcard to win the prestigious pre-Wimbledon title since American Pete Sampras 20 years ago.

He could have been the oldest player to win a Tour-level title too since 43-year-old Ken Rosewall in 1977, but a few hours earlier Roger Federer claimed that honour in Halle.



Spain's Feliciano Lopez poses with the winner's trophy after his victory over France's Gilles Simon in the final of the ATP Fever-Tree Championships tournament at Queen's Club in west London yesterday.

BOTTOMLINE

Ashleigh Barty: From quitting tennis to world number one

AFP
Paris

Newly-crowned world number one Ashleigh Barty could never have imagined winning a Grand Slam title and rising to the summit of the rankings when she took a break from professional tennis in 2014.

But the 23-year-old Queenslander has gone from strength to strength since returning at Eastbourne three years ago following a brief stint as a professional cricketer.

She became Australia's first women's world number one since Evonne Goolagong-Cawley in 1976 by beating her doubles partner Julia Goerges in yesterday's final of the WTA event in Birmingham.

Barty broke through with her maiden Grand Slam triumph at the French Open earlier this month, before saying her "next goal" was to usurp Japanese star Naomi Osaka as world number one. She extended her winning streak at 12 matches by seeing



Australia's Ashleigh Barty with the trophy after beating Germany's Julia Goerges in the Birmingham final.

off German Goerges 6-3, 7-5, and she now has not lost since a defeat by Kristina Mladenovic on May 16 at the Italian Open in Rome. Barty, the first player from her country to win Roland Garros since Margaret Court in 1973, featured for the Brisbane Heat cricket team in the Women's Big

Bash League four years ago, playing nine matches with a top score of 39.

"No, not at all," Barty said after the French Open of her hopes of winning a major title when she started her comeback with a surprising run to the Eastbourne semi-finals in 2016.

"I was very nervous (at Eastbourne) because I didn't even know if I would get in the draw..."

"I remember at the end of that week, my body was shot. It wasn't used to playing matches again. It was incredible."

"To know that it was three years ago – it feels like only yesterday that we were there and in the same breath it also feels like it was a lifetime ago."

Barty lost in three Grand Slam doubles finals alongside Casey Dellacqua in 2013, but had only won two singles matches and lost nine at the big four tournaments when she stepped away five years ago. Barty did not even play another Grand Slam singles main-draw tie until 2017, and only reached the second week of a major for the first time at last year's US Open.

But she does not think she could have seen such a stunning upturn in her fortunes without taking a hiatus.

"Absolutely not. I don't even know if I'd be sitting here talking to you if I was playing tennis (and) if I didn't step away," Barty said. "It's obviously a part of my

life that I needed to deal with, and I feel like it was the best decision that I made at the time, and it was an even better one coming back."

Barty's game is built around a strong serve and an excellent backhand slice, a rarity in the women's game.

Her unusual style appears perfectly-suited for grass-court tennis, with the start of Wimbledon on July 1 looming large.

Barty said the clay-court French Open, which she won with a 6-1, 6-3 final thrashing of Czech teenager Marketa Vondrousova, was the last Grand Slam she expected to win, potentially firing a warning to her Wimbledon rivals.

With 23-time major champion Serena Williams' failure to win a Slam title since January 2017 leaving the women's game more open, Barty now hopes a rivalry can blossom with Osaka, two years her junior.

"I think we have only played a couple of times, but I'm sure that we'll play many more times over both of our careers, and hopefully they're in big matches."

SPOTLIGHT

Murray crowns return with Queen's Club doubles success

Reuters
London

Twice Wimbledon champion Andy Murray capped a dream return to action after five months out by winning the Queen's Club championships doubles title with Feliciano Lopez yesterday.

The 32-year-old British favourite, five times a singles champion at the prestigious grasscourt event, looked overjoyed as he and Spaniard Lopez claimed a 7-6(6) 5-7 10-5 over Briton Joe Salisbury and American Rajevee Ram.

For Lopez it completed an unlikely double after the 37-year-old wildcard had earlier taken the singles title for the second time, outlasting Frenchman Gilles Simon in nearly three hours. The Spaniard belted a forehand winner to give the duo match points and when Salisbury mistimed a forehand wide off a Murray serve, the Briton jumped for joy.

Three-time Grand Slam champion Murray had hip re-



Britain's Andy Murray (R) and Spain's Feliciano Lopez pose with the trophy.

surfacing surgery in February in a bid to salvage a career that appeared to be over when he lost an emotional second-round match at this year's Australian Open. The former world number one has reported being "pain free" as he takes his first steps back on Tour in doubles before hopefully resuming his singles career later this year.

Sheikh Joaan signs agreement to host Beach Games; attends IOC HQ inauguration



Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani and HE QOC Secretary-General Jassim Rashid al-Buenain (right) with Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) senior vice-president Robin Mitchell (second from left) and ANOC Secretary-General Gunilla Lindberg (left) after signing an agreement to host ANOC World Beach Games 2019 and ANOC General Assembly 2019 in October in Doha.



Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani attended the inauguration of the new headquarters (Olympic House) of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Lausanne, Switzerland, yesterday. A number of IOC's members, presidents of international federations, heads of national committees and dignitaries of the Olympic Movement attended the inauguration ceremony. The opening of the new headquarters coincided with the 125th anniversary of IOC, which falls on June 23. The IOC's new headquarters glass facade represents IOC's future message of transparency, flexibility, and sustainability.

FORMULA 1

Hamilton wins at Paul Ricard in Mercedes one-two

Briton finishes 18 seconds ahead of Bottas for team's 50th one-two, Leclerc in third

Reuters
Le Castellet, France

Lewis Hamilton put on a display of domination at the French Grand Prix yesterday to go 36 points clear in the Formula One world championship and stretch Mercedes's winning run to 10 races.

On a scorchingly hot afternoon in the south of France, Hamilton put the rest of the field in the shade as he led from start to finish to take his fourth win in a row and sixth of the season.

The Briton finished 18 seconds ahead of Finnish teammate Valtteri Bottas, who was pushed hard at the end by Ferrari's Charles Leclerc in a rare moment of tension, as Mercedes celebrated their 50th one-two finish.

"We are creating history together and I'm so proud to be part of this team," said Hamilton, who also won from pole last year at Le Castellet.

"It wasn't easy at all and everything is on the edge. I had quite big blisters on the front two tyres – but this has been the best start of the year."

The five-times world champion now has 79 career wins, 12 short of Michael Schumacher's all-time record with 13 races remaining this season.

He has 187 points to Bottas's 151. Mercedes have won all eight races this year as well as the last two of 2018.

Until the closing laps, the main thrill on Sunday was provided by a marshal who darted across the track to retrieve a broken bollard.

Hamilton made a clean start, was 2.3 seconds clear of Bottas after six laps and continued to pull away despite complaining at one point that something had broken on his seat – a gripe undetermined by the Briton lapping faster and faster.

Max Verstappen was fourth for Red Bull while Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel moved up from seventh on the grid to fifth and gained an extra point after pitting on the penultimate lap for fresh tyres to set the fastest lap.

"This weekend, the biggest aim was to close the gap as much as possible and we failed," said Vettel, now 76 points behind Hamilton – the equivalent to more than three race wins.

"We have to understand why



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton celebrates after winning the French Grand Prix in the parc ferme at Circuit Paul Ricard in Le Castellet, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

We failed, but we won't give up, says Vettel

AFP
Le Castellet, France

Sebastian Vettel conceded yesterday that he and Ferrari had failed to deliver at the French Grand Prix where they had aimed to halt or slow Mercedes' juggernaut. The four-time world champion finished fifth, having started seventh on the grid, while Ferrari teammate Charles Leclerc came home third behind Mercedes duo Lewis Hamilton and Valtteri Bottas.

After failing also in an attempt to overturn the penalty in Montreal that deprived them

of a Canadian win two weeks ago, Vettel's only consolation was that he recorded fastest lap in the dying seconds on a fresh set of soft tyres.

"Our objective this weekend was to close the gap a significant amount, which we didn't do. So, in that regard, we failed."

"But that does not mean we are giving up," said Vettel. "It's pretty straightforward. We are fast in the straights and not so fast in the corners."

"So, depending on the track layout, some weekends are good for us and some weekends are worse. Hopefully, the track layout in Austria comes a little bit our way."

Vettel added that his troubled weekend even threw up a gremlin on his final lap when he managed to clock a circuit record lap to take fastest lap of the race from Hamilton. "It was quite tight," he said. "We seemed to have a problem with discharging the battery in the final lap, so it was a bit strange."

"Otherwise, it should have been a bit more straightforward." After reeling off an eighth win in succession and extending their unbeaten run overall to 10 races, Mercedes now have a lead of 140 points ahead of Ferrari in the constructors' championship.

Kimi Raikkonen was eighth for Alfa Romeo with Renault's Nico Hulkenberg ninth and Lando Norris 10th for McLaren after losing three places on the last lap.

FRENCH GP RESULTS (TOP 10)

1. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1:24:31.198
2. Valtteri Bottas (Mercedes) +18.056
3. Charles Leclerc (Ferrari) +18.985
4. Max Verstappen (Red Bull) +34.905
5. Sebastian Vettel (Ferrari) +1:02.796
6. Carlos Sainz Jr (McLaren) +1:35.462
7. Daniel Ricciardo (Renault) 1 lap
8. Kimi Raikkonen (Alfa Romeo Racing) 1 lap
9. Nico Hulkenberg (Renault) 1 lap
10. Lando Norris (McLaren) 1 lap

DRIVERS' STANDINGS (TOP 3)

1. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 187 pts
2. Valtteri Bottas (Mercedes) 151
3. Sebastian Vettel (Ferrari) 111

CONSTRUCTORS' STANDINGS (TOP 3)

1. Mercedes 338 pts
2. Ferrari 198
3. Red Bull-Honda 136

FOCUS

Qatar's Abdulla battles back to sixth in T3 at Italian Baja



Agencies
Pordenone, Italy

Qatar's Adel Abdulla overcame his early windscreen wiper issues on Saturday to finish the gruelling Italian Baja in sixth position in the T3 category yesterday.

The third round of the FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Bajas was particularly demanding on this occasion. Heavy rain, mud and difficult passes through the Cosa and Tagliamento rivers made the going extremely difficult for the T3 cars, which could not benefit from a windscreen or side windows like their T1 and T2 counterparts.

Abdulla and French co-driver Jean-Michel Polato guided their Can-Am Maverick X3 to the finish in a total time of 7hrs 05min 46sec and that put them 56min 34sec behind the eventual Russian winner Fedor Vorobyev, but enabled the Doha-based driver to remain firmly in contention for the T3 title after three rounds of the eight-race series.

Running with support from the FN Speed Team and Ooredoo, the Qatar telecommunications company, Abdulla now has less than a month to prepare for the fourth round in the heat of Spain in July.

Abdulla said: "We finished the race after a better final day than yesterday. We pushed on the first stage today, but there is no service between the stages. I had nothing to lose and I needed to catch up time. In the last 30km of the first stage this morning we had a slow rear-left puncture and I thought something was wrong with the rear arm, but we still did a good time."

"The second stage, we were

fast and clean until five kilometres from the finish, the belt destroyed itself and we had to change it and lost around four or five minutes. We have more points now, but the Russian driver won and claimed the 25 points and that will make it a little more difficult for us now. Saying that, we have five races to go and we will see what happens."

The Qatari began the third of the runs through the 79.43km of the Barbeano selective section in eighth overall in the T3 rankings, with Italy's Amerigo Ventura leading the way from Vorobyev and Santiago Navarro.

Poland's Michal Goczal clocked the fastest time of 1hr 07min 49sec on a stage where Abdulla was sixth quickest and moved up to seventh overall when former leader Amerigo Ventura was sidelined at the night halt. Various time penalties were also imposed on several drivers and Vorobyev found himself leading the category by 1min 23.5sec from Navarro.

Two runs through the revised 80.15km of the Gradisca stage followed yesterday before the return to Pordenone for the ceremonial finish.

Michal Goczal set a second successive fastest time of 1hr 08min 53sec through the opener to consolidate his fourth position, as Vorobyev increased his overall advantage over Navarro to 3min 52.5sec and Adel Abdulla maintained seventh with the fifth quickest time.

Vorobyev sealed the win with a final stage time of 1hr 11min 29sec, but the last stage win went to Michal Goczal, as Abdulla confirmed valuable championship points for finishing in sixth place after Omani rival Abdullah al-Zubair hit a tree and dropped out of contention.