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Wednesday, June 5, 2019  
Shawwal 2, 1440 AH

# GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

South Africa not to be taken lightly, says Kohli

Page 2

FOOTBALL FRIENDLY

# Chance for Qatar young guns to impress against Brazil

'Of course, if Neymar plays we will try our best to minimise his impact on the match but they also have other great players'



Akram Afif of Qatar in action during a training session.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

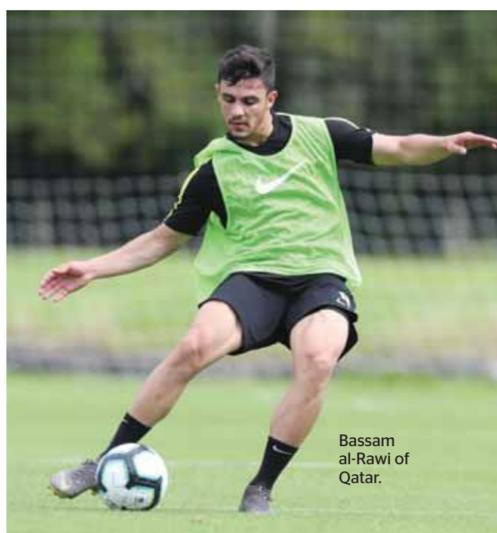
Qatar's young stars such as Almoez Ali, Akram Afif and Bassem al-Rawi will get a rare chance to impress against Brazil when the teams clash in a friendly international at the 72,000-capacity Mané Garrincha Stadium in Brasilia.

The match will be played at 3.30am Qatar Time tomorrow and is only the second occasion that Qatar will be facing the mighty Selecao, renowned for their passion and style that have fetched them five World Cup titles so far.

The only time the two sides met previously was in 1979 when Brazil won 6-1, and although the Samba Kings are ranked third in the FIFA rankings currently, as against Qatar's 55th, Felix Sanchez's boys are determined to make a fight of it.

The Brazil match, of course, is Qatar's biggest friendly ever and is part of the country's preparations for the Copa America beginning later this month in which they have been placed in Group B along with Argentina, Colombia and Paraguay.

But as the team builds up to the FIFA World Cup in 2022,



Bassam al-Rawi of Qatar.

the QFA will be lining up more prestigious friendlies, a ploy that worked well for the country ahead of the Asian Cup earlier this year, which they won.

Ahead of the Asian tournament, Qatar played matches against Iceland, Switzerland, China and Ecuador, among others.

They caused a shock when

they defeated Switzerland 1-0 and drew 1-1 with Iceland. Those performances went a long way in raising the profile and morale ahead of the Asian Cup in which they defeated teams such as South Korea, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Japan on way to the title.

Brazil, despite their prestige in world football, have not had it

all smooth in recent times. They failed to get past the quarter-finals of last year's World Cup in Russia, losing to Belgium, and have been also dogged by controversies.

As far as the Copa America is concerned, the last of their eight titles came in 2007, but there is no denying the fact that they can be dangerous on their home turf.

"There are not many difficult things to do than playing against Brazil," Sanchez said before heading off to the US along with the team, en route to Brazil.

"Of course, if Neymar plays we will try our best to minimise his impact on the match but they also have other great players," he added.

Qatar will have a closed door game against a club team on June 9 before taking on Paraguay on June 16 in the Copa America.

Sanchez added that he was not thinking about the results in the tournament.

"We will try our best to compete. Let's see how far we can go. In any case the experience of playing in the Copa America would be of great help to the players. They will be much better players after that. It will help them for the big challenges ahead, especially the 2022 World Cup."

**Qatar's Salman al-Ansari elected to AFC Appeals Committee**

**Paris:** Qatar's Salman A al-Ansari has been elected as deputy chairperson of the Asian Football Confederation's (AFC) Appeals Committee at the AFC Extraordinary Congress in Paris. AFC Member Associations elected the chairpersons, deputy chairpersons and members of the AFCs judicial bodies - AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee, AFC Entry Control Body and the AFC Appeal Committee. All members will now serve for a period of four years based on the recommendation of the AFC Executive Committee.

**AFC Appeals Committee:**  
**Chairperson:** Jahangir Baglari (Islamic Republic of Iran); **Deputy Chairperson:** Salman A al-Ansari (Qatar); **Dong-Ho Lim** (Korea Republic); **Saaran Nadarajah** (Malaysia); **Syed Nayyar Hasmain Haider** (Pakistan); and **Nguyen Thi My Dzung** (Vietnam)

2019 ICC CRICKET WORLD CUP

# Pradeep, Malinga strike as Lanka beat Afghans

AFP  
Cardiff

Nuwan Pradeep and Lasith Malinga starred with the ball as Sri Lanka fought back to crush Afghanistan's hopes of a memorable World Cup victory yesterday.

Afghanistan, bidding for just their second win in a World Cup match and their first over a Test nation were in command halfway through a gloomy day in Cardiff after dismissing Sri Lanka for 201.

But faced with a rain-revised target of 187 in 41 overs, their batting let them down again as they were bowled out for 152.

Victory saw Sri Lanka bounce back from a 10-wicket thrashing by New Zealand in their World Cup opener.

Pradeep took a career-best four for 31, while Malinga (three for 39) struck at both ends of the innings, finishing the match with a trademark yorker that bowled Hamid Hassan.

Afghanistan had slumped to 57 for five, with Thisara Perera holding a brilliant running catch in the deep to dismiss Hazratullah Zazai on the hook for 30.

Afghanistan captain Gulbadin Naib (23) and Najibullah Zadran (43) then started to turn the match again with a sixth-wicket stand of 64.

But paceman Pradeep struck twice, having Naib lbw before bowling Rashid Khan to leave Afghanistan 123 for seven.

And when Najibullah was run out by a direct hit from Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne, Afghanistan were all but beaten at nine down.



Sri Lanka's Nuwan Pradeep (2L) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Afghanistan's Rashid Khan for two runs at Sophia Gardens Stadium in Cardiff yesterday.

Earlier, Sri Lanka came out of the blocks quickly against the unfancied Af-

ghans, who suffered a seven-wicket loss to champions Australia in their tourna-

ment opener, and were set for an imposing total at 144 for one.

## SCORECARD

SRI LANKA INNINGS		AFGHANISTAN INNINGS	
D. Karunaratne c Najibullah b Nabi	30	M Shahzad c Karunaratne b Malinga	7
K. Perera c Shahzad b Rashid	78	Hazratullah Zazai c Perera b Pradeep	30
L. Thirimanne b Nabi	25	Rahmat Shah c Mathews b Udana	2
K. Mendis c Rahmat b Nabi	2	Hashmatullah c Perera b Pradeep	4
A. Mathews c Rahmat b Nabi	0	Mohamed Nabi b Perera	11
D. de Silva c Shahzad b Hamid	0	Gulbadin Naib lbw b Pradeep	23
T. Perera run out (Hashmatullah)	2	Najibullah run out (Karunaratne)	43
I. Udana b Dawlat	10	Rashid Khan b Pradeep	2
S. Lakmal not out	15	Dawlat Zadran b Malinga	6
L. Malinga b Dawlat	4	Hamid Hassan b Malinga	6
N. Pradeep b Rashid	0	Mujeeb Ur Rahman not out	1
Extras (lb10, nb3, w22)	35	Extras (lb1, nb1, w15)	17
<b>Total (all out, 36.5 overs)</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>Total (all out, 32.4 overs)</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-92 (Karunaratne), 2-144 (Thirimanne), 3-146 (Mendis), 4-146 (Mathews), 5-149 (De Silva), 6-159 (Perera), 7-178 (Udana), 8-180 (Perera), 9-199 (Malinga), 10-201 (Pradeep)		<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-34 (Shahzad), 2-42 (Rahmat), 3-44 (Hazratullah), 4-57 (Hashmatullah), 5-57 (Nabi), 6-121 (Gulbadin), 7-123 (Rashid), 8-136 (Dawlat), 9-145 (Najibullah), 10-152 (Hamid)	
<b>Bowling:</b> Dawlat 6-0-34-2 (3w); Hamid 7-0-53-1 (2w); Mujeeb 3-0-19-0 (1w); Nabi 9-0-30-4 (1w); Gulbadin 4-0-38-0 (3nb, 2w); Rashid 7.5-1-17-2 (1w)		<b>Bowling:</b> Malinga 6.4-0-39-3 (3w); Lakmal 6-0-27-0 (2w); Udana 6-0-28-1 (1nb); Pradeep 9-1-31-4 (4w); Perera 4-0-19-1 (2w); De Silva 1-0-7-0	

But they lost their last nine wickets for 57 runs, Mohamed Nabi taking three in five balls after Gulbadin won the toss.

Shell-shocked Sri Lanka kept on losing wickets at regular intervals, with 35 extras the second-highest scorer of the innings behind Kusal Perera's 78.

A dramatic 22nd over saw Nabi bowled Lahiru Thirimanne for 25 before having Kusal Mendis caught by Rahmat

Shah in the slips for two.

Angelo Mathews was next to go, for a duck, also caught by Shah.

Leg-spinner Rashid Khan eventually got in on the act when he had opener Kusal Perera, who had seen wickets tumble at the other end, caught behind.

Rain then intervened, forcing the players from the field, with Sri Lanka 182-8.



## FOCUS

# Proteas not to be taken lightly: India captain Kohli

'Whether Ngidi plays, or Steyn plays or not, Rabada is always going to be a world-class bowler and a threat to any side'

Agencies  
Southampton, England

India are banking on their experience in their World Cup opener against South Africa and cannot take the opposition's depleted bowling attack lightly, captain Virat Kohli said yesterday, insisting the Proteas can call upon quality replacements.

Kohli's India are ranked second in the world and will be firm favourites as they begin their quest for a third World Cup triumph against a South African side that faces an uphill struggle after the loss of strike bowlers Dale Steyn and Lungi Ngidi.

"We need to bring all our experience to the play tomorrow to be able to make right decisions in pressure situations," Kohli told reporters during a training session ahead of today's match in Southampton.

"So we never take anyone lightly, and whether a few key players get injured or not, if a youngster is stepping in and he has the right mindset, he can really perform on the day... we need to maintain respect for that and focus on our strength and what we can do as a side."

Kohli, who is captaining the Indian side for the first time in a World Cup, said his team's late start to the tournament allows them to learn from previous games and match conditions.

"From that point of view, we would say that we have a lot of positives that we can take out of starting after everyone else."

India have won the World Cup in 1983 and 2011, while South Africa has never won the 50-over edition, but Kohli said this year's tournament presents a different challenge.

Kohli said the unique format of the 2019 tournament, in which every nation plays nine matches over more than a month, means that teams must adapt very quickly and that experienced teams will have an edge.

"The errors you would make when you are not that aware of game situations, they will slowly start to taper off as you play more and more cricket."

"When you have experienced people in your team who have also grown with you as cricketers, eventually you all start making good decisions, you have discussions, you think of the right thing, sometimes instinctively."

## KOHLI READY TO ROTATE BOWLERS

The Indian captain is prepared to vary his World Cup attack by adopting a 'horses for courses' strategy.



India's captain Virat Kohli (left) and teammates take part in a training session in Southampton, England, on Monday. (AFP)

## India announce home schedule for 2019-20 season

Reuters  
Bengaluru

Five countries will tour India in the 2019-20 season with the hosts scheduled to play five Test matches, starting with a series against South Africa later this year, the country's cricket board (BCCI) has said.

Virat Kohli's top-ranked Test side face South Africa in the first of three Twenty20 Internationals on September 15 followed by a three-Test series in October.

India's last two home Tests of the season are against Bangladesh in November 2019, with

the teams also scheduled to play three T20s.

The five Tests are part of the inaugural World Test Championship which involves the nine top-ranked Test nations competing in a league between July 2019 and April 2021, with the top two teams progressing to the final to be held in June 2021.

India will play nine ODIs and 12 T20s in total at home with the West Indies arriving in December, followed by visits from Zimbabwe and Australia in January. Kohli's men wrap up the season with a three-match ODI series against South Africa in March.

India, the world's number-two ranked team and one of the favourites alongside hosts England and Australia, launch their challenge against an injury-hit South Africa in Southampton today, nearly a week after the tournament started.

South Africa will be without star fast bowler Dale Steyn, whose World Cup ended without him bowling a ball after he was

ruled out with a shoulder injury, while fellow paceman Lungi Ngidi has yet to recover from a hamstring problem.

By contrast, India's quicks are fit and ready to fire, having enjoyed previous success in English conditions.

Led by Jasprit Bumrah, the world's number one ODI bowler, the team's pace attack includes Mohamed Shami, Bhuvneshwar

Kumar and Hardik Pandya.

Three specialist spinners in Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal and Ravindra Jadeja lend variety to the bowling attack.

Kohli believes rotating his bowling options gives India, the 1983 and 2011 World Cup winners, their best chance of success.

"The flexibility would matter in the bowling set-up is how we foresee things. The batting line-up will have to be consistent," said Kohli, whose side called off their final pre-match net session because of rain at Hampshire's headquarters ground.

"I think with match-ups in terms of playing against, if there are more left-handers then the bowling combination can alter a little bit."

"So that sort of message has been given within the team and the guys have accepted it. They understand that they will have to play certain roles at different stages in the tournament."

Meanwhile Kohli insisted that a Proteas pace led by Kagiso Rabada remained a potent force, even without Steyn sidelined from the World Cup.

"Look whether Ngidi plays, or Steyn plays or not, Rabada is always going to be a world-class bowler and a threat to any side he plays against," he said.

## South Africa can still reach semis without Steyn, says Du Plessis

Agencies  
Southampton, United Kingdom

South Africa captain Faf du Plessis said his struggling side could still reach the World Cup semi-finals, even after talisman paceman Dale Steyn was ruled out of the tournament with a shoulder injury. The 35-year-old fast bowler had been battling to be fit in time for today's crucial clash against India in Southampton after two defeats in two matches for South Africa. But the seamer has been forced to admit defeat, leaving head coach Ottis Gibson's side short of firepower.

"Steyn has suffered a second shoulder injury which has not responded to treatment and has ruled him out of bowling for the foreseeable future," Cricket South Africa said in a statement.

South Africa have called up left-arm pace bowler Beuran Hendricks as a replacement for the remainder of the tournament, with Lungi Ngidi also nursing a hamstring problem.

Paceman Anrich Nortje was ruled out with a thumb issue before the World Cup even started.

But Du Plessis said despite their injury problems and their poor



start to the tournament, South Africa were aiming to reach the last four of the round-robin event, in which all 10 teams play each other.

"Six games is the target, and there's seven games left," the skipper told reporters during his pre-match press conference at the Ageas Bowl.

"It would be great if we could start that tomorrow. There's no easy games any more in the World Cup... Whether it's winning or losing, the main thing is getting to the semi-finals."

South Africa, who have never won the World Cup, have endured a wretched start to the tournament, losing to hosts England by 104 runs then slipping to a 21-run loss to Bangladesh on Sunday.

Top-order batsman Hashim Amla returns for the India game after missing the second match following a hit on the head

during the tournament opener against England.

### STAY POSITIVE

Du Plessis said he it was important to stay "strong and positive" despite the challenge of working with limited resources. "Naturally, guys will have a little bit of confidence that's been chucked away and that is normal, that is part of being human," he said.

Hendricks will arrive today but will not be available to face India.

Du Plessis said he hoped Steyn's international career was not at an end.

"It's been a tough two-and-half years for him, and he would need support right now," he said. "The team and management will put things in place to look after him. He needs love at the moment, he tried really hard to get fit for this campaign."

Du Plessis admitted South Africa's injury problems had forced him to draw up a new plan.

"I think we'll really have to look at that now, there's only 14 players to pick from now. There's not a lot of options for the bowling attack," he said.

"You have to decide whether you go with all your all-rounders in your team, bat deep and try to get a big score."

## World Cup players attend Eid prayers

AFP  
Southampton, United Kingdom

South Africa cricketers Hashim Amla (centre) and Imran Tahir attended Eid prayers at a Southampton mosque yesterday ahead of their team's crucial World Cup clash against India.

The two players were warmly greeted by fellow worshippers, with selfie-seekers making a beeline to grab a photo with them.

Both players are veterans in the South Africa side, who have lost their two opening matches at the World Cup in England and Wales.

The 40-year-old Tahir, a Pakistan-born leg-spinner, is set to quit one-day-internationals after the tournament.

Top-order batsman Amla, 36, missed the team's second World Cup game against Bangladesh on Sunday after being hit on the head by a bouncer in



the tournament opener against England.

Pakistani umpire Aleem Dar, who is standing at the World Cup, also accompanied the South Africa duo for Eid prayers.

Pakistan players visited a Nottingham mosque a day after their dramatic 14-run victory over tournament hosts England

as fans gathered to congratulate them.

The Pakistan squad were provided with tight security following a March attack on a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, that left 51 Muslim worshippers dead.

The Bangladesh team, touring New Zealand at the time, narrowly escaped the attack.

## BOTTOMLINE

# Hardik Pandya – India's World Cup 'X-factor'

AFP  
Southampton, United Kingdom

Flamboyant all-rounder Hardik Pandya has been tipped as India's potential "X-factor" at the World Cup with his ability to change games single-handedly with both bat and ball.

An attacking middle-order batsman, medium-fast bowler and quick in the field, the 25-year-old is preparing for his World Cup bow against South Africa after an impressive campaign in the Indian Premier League.

Pandya, who cuts a striking figure with his tattoos, mohawk haircut and earrings, was suspended earlier this year over sexist remarks on a TV chat show.

But after apologising and missing several internationals he returned to the national team and caught the eye in the IPL for Mumbai Indians, who won a fourth title.

Singled out by Rahul Dravid as having the "X-factor" just a year after his debut, Pandya, who first played for India in 2016, has won praise from a



clutch of former cricketers.

"Hardik's form in the IPL has been outstanding and he can be a game-changer for India," former India captain Sunil Gavaskar told AFP. "He is very, very impressive."

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

Former West Indies captain Clive Lloyd, who won the World Cup twice, predicted that all-rounders would play a crucial role at the tournament in England and Wales.

"From Afghanistan to England, or from India to West Indies, every team is blessed with top-class all-rounders – that's why I believe it will be an all-rounders' World Cup."

Pandya's impressive limited-overs performances earned him a first Test

cap in 2017 and he justified his selection with a century and fifty in the three-match series in Sri Lanka that India won 3-0.

He has been compared with Kapil Dev, who was one of the top players in a golden era for all-rounders also including Pakistan's Imran Khan, Richard Hadlee of New Zealand and England's Ian Botham.

But Dev has cautioned the media and fans not to burden the young talent with the pressure of expectations.

"He is an upcoming player... Please do not put pressure on him," he said. "He is a young talent – let him play his cricket with his own free mind."

Former Australia bowler Andy Bichel said Pandya and Ravindra Jadeja will hold the aces for India in the middle overs in seaming English conditions.

"Jadeja and Hardik Pandya have to perform if India are going to do a job," said Bichel, who was part of Australia's World Cup-winning team in 2003.

"Because there are going to be those middle overs where the games will be won or lost," the cricketer-turned-analyst added.





FOCUS

# Bangladesh look to Shakib to tame New Zealand

'I think that we are in a good place, mentally. I think if we can continue in this manner, we can go a long way'

AFP  
London

**B**angladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has set his sights on a memorable 200th one-day international as his side chase a second successive World Cup win against New Zealand today.

Shakib was the key man when Bangladesh upset South Africa by 21 runs in their opening match on Sunday. His composed 75 helped steer Bangladesh to their highest one-day international total of 330 for six before the spinner took 1-50 to restrict South Africa to 309-8.

That wicket made Shakib only the fifth player behind Sri Lanka's Sanath Jayasuriya, South African Jacques Kallis, and Pakistan pair Shahid Afridi and Abdul Razzaq to reach the landmark of 5,000 runs and 250 wickets in ODIs.

The 32-year-old's next challenge comes at the Oval against a New Zealand side who crushed Sri Lanka by 10 wickets in their opening match.

Shakib has experience of upsetting the Black Caps after inspiring their five-wicket win over New Zealand in the 2017 Champions Trophy with the most recent of his seven ODI hundreds.

Bangladesh missed Shakib when a finger injury ruled him out of the ODI series in New Zealand earlier this year, in which they were routed 3-0 by the hosts and the all-rounder hopes Bangladesh will put up a tougher fight against New Zealand this time.

"Building up to this World Cup, we knew what challenges we might face. We prepared well, so that gave us a lot of confidence and belief. We came to this World Cup wanting to do well," he said. "We are up for the challenge but at the same time we are re-



Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan (left) plays a shot during the 2019 ICC Cricket World Cup match against South Africa at The Oval in London on Sunday. (AFP)

laxed. We knew we had the skill to beat big teams.

"I think that we are in a good place, mentally. I think if we can continue in this manner, we can

go a long way in the tournament."

**MILESTONE MOMENT** Shakib will become only the third Bangladesh player to play

200 or more ODIs, behind skipper Mashrafe Mortaza (210) and Mushfiqur Rahim (206).

But he remains modest about his milestone moment.



New Zealand's Matt Henry (centre) celebrates with teammates after the dismissal of Sri Lanka's Lahiru Thirimanne during the 2019 ICC Cricket World Cup match in Cardiff, Wales, on Saturday. (AFP)

"I'm very happy the way I contributed (in the last game). If I do that every time, the stats will take care of themselves," Shakib said.

"I don't normally look at it (his statistics), but if people are talking about it, I obviously feel happy."

New Zealand showed against Sri Lanka that they are a well-rounded team more than capable of going a long way in the tournament.

They did not miss pace spearhead Tim Southee (calf) and top-order batsman Henry Nicholls (hamstring) in their opening game.

Matt Henry, who replaced

Southee, took three wickets in Sri Lanka's 136 all out, while openers Colin Munro and Martin Guptill knocked off the 137 required in just 16.1 overs.

Latham, whose media call was delayed due to road closures resulting from US President Donald Trump's state visit, sidestepped a question about whether the recovering pair had been considered.

"They're a day by day thing. They are certainly getting better as each day goes by, which is great," he said.

"It's a long tournament so it's important to make sure the guys are 100 percent fully fit by the

time they get back on the park. Hopefully, there will be a chance for the next game."

Vice-captain Tom Latham told reporters yesterday that the Black Caps expected to be put under pressure by opponents who upset South Africa in their opener at the same South London ground.

"We're going in with the same side. I think the way we played in the last game bodes a lot of confidence for the group," he said.

"I think the way the bowlers went about things, they challenged Sri Lanka pretty much from ball one and I'm sure the same side are looking to repeat that tomorrow."

COMMENT

## Our fielding was as bad as I've seen

By Nasser Hussain  
Daily Mail



**Y**ou know you've had a bad day when your captain admits you have been out-fielded by Pakistan.

That was England's fate here and that, rather than any weaknesses in the batting or bowling, is why they lost at Trent Bridge. It really wasn't good enough.

The big debate going into this tournament was whether England could chase down a big target with the pressure and expectations of the World Cup on their shoulders. Despite having two century-makers, they could not quite do it.

This was so nearly a real marker for England. The highest successful chase by any side in World Cup history would have been a real signal of intent, but they came up against Pakistan at their brilliant, unpredictable best.

Let's not blame the batsmen, even though Joe Root and Jos Buttler will be annoyed they could not take England over the line after reaching three figures.

This was not quite like those high-scoring Trent Bridge one-day games of recent times because this was not the better of a pitch on which England made history against Australia by smashing 481 last year. It



England's Jason Roy drops a catch from Pakistan's Mohamed Hafeez (not pictured) during their ICC Cricket World Cup match at Trent Bridge in Nottingham, England, on Monday. (Reuters)

was still a good surface but it was a little two-paced.

Even when Pakistan dismissed Root their work was not done because no game against England is won while Buttler is at the crease. He showed again just what a phenomenal cricketer he is.

It was only when Buttler was gone immediately after reaching his hundred that Pakistan would have been confident of completing what was eventually a 14-run win.

Pakistan missed a trick when they turned to Wahab Riaz when Root and Buttler came together but failed to put a slip in. Buttler edged it

straight through the gap.

That almost proved extremely costly for Pakistan. If you let him get away with chances like that – and drop Root – then they will punish you. It is hard enough to bowl this England side out as it is without giving them extra lives.

What will really bother Eoin Morgan is the fielding after they were so good at the Oval last week.

They were just not on it from the first ball which went down to Jofra Archer and he fumbled it. When two balls later the ball went past Morgan himself for four, the tone was set. It was cricket biting

England on the backside after all that had gone right against South Africa.

The bowling was fine – Archer is a young, inexperienced lad, he will have good and bad days – but this was as bad a fielding display as I've seen from this England team. That will have taught them a lesson.

I wouldn't put it down to World Cup nerves. This is not a nervous side. But bad fielding is like a virus. When there are two early misfields and then there's a missed catch, it spreads through the whole team.

England have to appreciate, too, that home advantage will not always mean they have the

support of the majority of the crowd. When they play India at Edgbaston it will feel like an away game.

Around half of the crowd were supporting Pakistan. England cannot allow that to unsettle them, as we seemed to see with Chris Woakes making a shushing gesture when he took a catch. They need to silence that crowd with the way they perform.

I don't like the way the tournament umpires seem to be clamping down on any small sign of aggression and even passion. We want teams playing it tough. We don't want robotic cricketers.

SPOTLIGHT

## English crowds 'stupid' to boo Warner: manager



Reuters  
Melbourne

**E**nglish crowds are "stupid" to jeer David Warner at the Cricket World Cup as it will only fire him up, the Australian batsman's manager James Erskine has said.

Warner, who has returned to the side following a 12-month ban for ball-tampering, was booed by the crowd during Australia's opening match against Pakistan in Bristol but struck an unbeaten 89 and was named man-of-the-match.

"I am English. Where the Poms are stupid is that it is actually going to encourage him. It will actually help him. The fact of the matter is, you concentrate, he won't want to fail, he got 89," Erskine said in comments published by Fairfax Media.

"They will learn very smartly that they are dealing with someone who has got the powers of concentration and his willpower, it's no different from a Steve Waugh or a Nick Faldo. That's

exactly what will happen here."

While former captain Steve Smith and test opener Cameron Bancroft – the other players punished for ball-tampering about the Cape Town scandal, Warner has declined to comment publicly.

He has dodged media interviews at the World Cup, barring a mandatory comment on-field with the host broadcaster after claiming the man-of-the-match award.

Erskine defended Warner's silence.

"There is no point talking. What's he going to talk about?"

"I think that policy will work... if he (Warner) goes and gets a ton against England or somebody like that, people will want to chat to him about his play."

"As I have said before, these guys (Warner and Smith) have taken a hit for a lot of other people and they paid their fine."

"They now basically have got to go out and play well and it looks as if they are going to play well."

Australia next face West Indies in Nottingham tomorrow.



## FOCUS

# Hasan hails Arthur for Pakistan revival as England beaten

'We had an upset against the West Indies on Friday but the guys bounced back'



Pakistan all-rounder Mohamed Hafeez (right) is helped to his feet by head coach Mickey Arthur during a training session in Nottingham, England, on Sunday. (AFP)

AFP  
Nottingham, United Kingdom

Hasan Ali said Pakistan coach Mickey Arthur's ongoing faith in the side was behind a stunning reversal of fortune that saw them end a long losing streak with a superb World Cup win over England.

Pakistan had lost their last 11 completed one-day internationals, including a recent 4-0 series defeat by World Cup hosts and favourites England that pre-

ceded a woeful collapse to 105 all out in their tournament opener against the West Indies at Trent Bridge on Friday.

But on Monday they piled up 348 for eight and then held their nerve in the field despite England hundreds from Joe Root and Jos Buttler.

"We were very disappointed we lost 11 games in a row but one thing is very important, we believed in ourselves," said pacesman Hasan who, amid a run-fest, bowled 10 overs for 66.

"We needed just a little bit of kick and then we will click. We

got that kick. We needed the win because we are playing at the World Cup. The World Cup is a different game, you have a lot of pressure.

"But one thing is very important, which is our coach is always backing us. That moment turned us as everyone was confident."

There was a large contingent of Pakistan fans at Nottinghamshire's headquarters on Monday and grateful paceman Hasan said: "We feel like we are playing at home."

"Since I came here in 2016

to this 2019 World Cup, it feels like our home because there is a lot of Pakistani community who always come and support us," he added.

#### PAKISTAN KEEN TO SHED 'UNPREDICTABLE' TAG

"We had an upset against the West Indies on Friday but, yes, the guys bounced back very well," fast bowler Hasan told reporters.

"We do a lot of hard work and we believe in ourselves and we have faith we can win the World Cup. People are saying we are un-

predictable, but we don't like it."

Man-of-the-match Mohamed Hafeez, who top-scored for Pakistan with an 84 off 62 balls and also took the wicket of England captain Eoin Morgan, said Pakistan were desperate to turn things around.

"It's a feeling of total relief. After the game against the West Indies we were really looking forward to this match and putting things right," he said.

"We know this team is very capable we just needed to start converting some matches into wins."

## SPOTLIGHT

## England's Roy, Archer fined for breaching ICC code

AFP  
London

Jason Roy and Jofra Archer have each been fined 15 percent of their match fees for incidents during England's World Cup defeat by Pakistan at Trent Bridge.

The International Cricket Council found opener Roy had breached level one of its code of conduct, using an audible obscenity after a misfield during Pakistan's innings.

Fast bowler Archer was found guilty of dissent towards an umpire's decision following a wide delivery.

Both players have also had one demerit point added to their records.

Pakistan captain Sarfaraz Ahmed was fined 20 percent of his fee, and his teammates 10 percent, for a minor over-rate offence.

Pakistan won Monday's match by 14 runs after setting England a target of 349.

It was an occasionally fractious encounter, with the um-

pires warning England skipper Eoin Morgan about his side throwing the ball in on the bounce and later issuing the same reminder to Sarfaraz.

The tactic is often used to scuff up the ball and promote reverse swing.

England batsman Jos Buttler appeared to take a look at the ball on his walk back to the pavilion after his knock of 103 came to an end.

Morgan said: "There were discussions throughout the whole of the two innings. The umpires came to me mid-innings and seemed to think that we were throwing the ball in on the bounce too much or it was being over-exaggerated."

"They emphasised it would be the same for both. The conversations that were stopping the game were that Pakistan were doing the same thing."

"Jos was just intrigued to see the ball. When the ball is hit against the LED boards it does scuff it up quite a lot so he was just interested to see if the ball was more scuffed up."



In this May 30, 2019, picture, England's Jofra Archer (right) celebrates with teammate Jason Roy after the dismissal of South Africa's captain Faf du Plessis at The Oval in London. (AFP)

## BOTTOMLINE

## 'Don't panic' Root tells England after loss to Pakistan

AFP  
Nottingham, United Kingdom

Joe Root urged England to keep calm and carry on after a surprise 14-run defeat by Pakistan at Trent Bridge on Monday checked their progress at the World Cup.

Both Root and Jos Buttler scored hundreds but Pakistan still managed to end a run of 11 straight losses in completed one-day internationals – including a 4-0 series defeat by England – with a well-deserved win.

But with all 10 teams playing each other in the round-robin group stage, one defeat is by no means the end of England's latest bid to win the men's World Cup for the first time.

Root now expects England, the world's top-ranked ODI side, to bounce back strongly against Bangladesh in Cardiff on Saturday.

"The most important thing now for us as a group is not to panic," he told reporters.

'Don't make mistakes twice'  
"We know what works for us as a formula, and as a team, but other sides are allowed to play well and we've got to make sure we learn quickly and bounce back at Cardiff."

"The temptation is to get a little bit tense, but one of our great strengths as a side is sticking to the way we go about things and

be as smart as possible.

"And the beauty of this format is I do believe the best four teams over the tournament will qualify for the semi-finals and we've got to make sure we play some good cricket in our remaining games."

The Test captain insisted: "One thing this side doesn't do very often is to make the same mistake twice and I'm sure the guys will make sure it's a very different performance against Bangladesh."

Pakistan's 348 for eight – in marked contrast to a total of 105 all against the West Indies in their tournament opener – left England needing a new record for the highest successful World Cup run-chase if they were to win on Monday.

They lost early wickets, however, on the way to 118 for four before Root (107) and Buttler (103) gave them hope with a partnership of 130.

England, however, were ultimately made to pay for an unusually sloppy display in the field.

Mohamed Hafeez was dropped by Jason Roy on 14 – a sitter of a chance at mid-off – before top-scoring for Pakistan with 84 while England gave away runs with several overthrows and miss-fields.

It was all so different from England's fine fielding effort during a 104-run thrashing of South Africa in last week's first match of this World Cup.

"It was just a really bad day in the field," said England captain Eoin Morgan.

"There were mistakes that we don't normally make. And that's disappointing."

"We've gone from probably one of our best performances in the field at the Oval to, not extremely bad, but it's cost us probably 15-20 runs in the field which is a lot in the one-day game."

The umpires warned both Morgan and Pakistan counterpart Sarfaraz Ahmed about deliberately throwing the ball in on the bounce – a tactic that is used to scuff the ball up in a bid to generate reverse swing.

Buttler also appeared to look long and hard at the ball after his dismissal.

"There were discussions throughout the whole of the two innings," said Morgan.

"The umpires came to me mid-innings and seemed to think that we were throwing the ball in on the bounce too much or it was being over-exaggerated."

"They emphasised it would be the same for both (teams)."

"The conversations that were stopping the game were that Pakistan were doing the same thing," he explained.

The Dubliner added: "Jos was just intrigued to see the ball. When the ball is hit against the LED boards (on the boundary) it does scuff it up quite a lot, so he was just interested to see if the ball was more scuffed up."



England's Joe Root reacts after losing his wicket during the 2019 ICC World Cup match against Pakistan at Trent Bridge in Nottingham, England, on Monday. (Reuters)

NBA

# Warriors' Looney out, Thompson questionable

'Klay said he'll be fine, but Klay could be half dead and he would say he would be fine'

AFP  
Oakland, United States

Golden State guard Klay Thompson is questionable for today's third game of the NBA Finals with a left hamstring strain while reserve forward Kevin Looney is out indefinitely, the Warriors announced on Monday.

The setbacks are the latest bad news for the injury-hit defending NBA champions, who are level with Toronto at 1-1 in the best-of-seven final entering games three and four this week in California.

An MRI exam on Monday showed Thompson has a mild left hamstring strain. He left Golden State's 109-104 victory Sunday at Toronto with 7:59 remaining in the fourth quarter with hamstring tightness.

"Klay said he'll be fine, but Klay could be half dead and he would say he would be fine," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said after game two. "We'll see. He pulled his hamstring. He thinks it is minor, so I don't know what that means going forward."

Looney was sidelined from game two with what the team called a chest contusion but Kerr said after the game the problem was "something with his shoulder."

An MRI showed Looney with a fracture of the cartilage connecting the right ribs to the sternum. The Warriors, trying to win their third straight NBA Finals and fourth in five years, have already been without top playoff scorer Kevin Durant for nearly a month with a right calf injury, leaving Kerr wondering just who will be healthy enough to play against the Raptors. "We'll see about all the injuries," Kerr said. "You need your bench, no matter what, but in particular when you've got a lot of injuries."

Two-time NBA Finals MVP Durant must take part in a practice before playing, Kerr said, but he called it "feasible" that Durant could take part in a Tuesday workout and return in game three on Wednesday. Durant joined the team in Toronto but only continued rehabilitation work.

DeMarcus Collins played nearly 28 minutes in game two as he fights back from a torn left



Golden State Warriors guard Klay Thompson (left) drives to the basket against Toronto Raptors forward Pascal Siakam during the first quarter in game two of the 2019 NBA Finals at Scotiabank Arena. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

quadriceps that had sidelined him for six weeks until the finals.

"He was fantastic and we needed everything he gave out there, his rebounding, his toughness, his physical presence," Kerr said. "He feels good in there right now so we do feel confident we can continue to get good minutes from him. We're going to need them with all these injuries."

Cousins stepped into the pressure of his first NBA Finals start a produced 11 points and 10 rebounds.

"It feels great," Cousins said. "It was an incredible moment for me. But I'm not satisfied and I'm

looking forward to game three."

**CURRY DIDN'T FEEL RIGHT**

Warriors' 3-point sharpshooter Stephen Curry started 0-for-6 and felt bad early but sparked a rally with a late second-quarter surge. "Just didn't feel right at the start of the game," Curry said. "But at the end of the day nothing's going to keep you from playing in the finals. So I have plenty of time to recover before game three. Don't really know what the cause was. Just didn't feel right."

Kerr said Curry "may have been a little dehydrated. That

was the word I got. He just was feeling a little bit lightheaded and went back into the training room and came back and was doing much better."

Andre Iguodala, the 2015 NBA Finals MVP, ignored a nagging left calf injury to sink the winning 3-pointer in the dying seconds.

"We've battled injuries. Every year throughout a playoff stretch, someone went down," Iguodala said. "It's a mindset. You go play. Not saying it's smart, but you only have about a week left to gut it out and see if you can help the team."

**WARRIORS TRUST BENCH**

It's no wonder the Warriors are struggling to figure out who will be healthy enough to play and which reserves need to play crucial minutes.

"We'll just continue to go to those guys and trust them," Kerr said. "They've proven that they can really help us."

The Warriors' motto is "Strength in Numbers" and Curry says that depth tribute is true now more than ever.

"Everybody's going to have a chance to help us at some point," Curry said. "Just stick with it and be patient."

MLB

# Machado slam helps Padres defeat slumping Phillies

Reuters  
San Diego

Manny Machado hit the ninth grand slam of his career on Monday night to cap a seven-run sixth inning as the San Diego Padres earned an 8-2 victory while handing the visiting Philadelphia Phillies a fifth consecutive defeat. But that might not be the biggest loss sustained by the Phillies at Petco Park.

Center fielder Andrew McCutchen had to be helped off the field in the first inning after injuring his left knee on a freak play.

McCutchen drew a walk to open the inning before Jean Segura

hit a high pop to second. When Segura fell leaving the batter's box, Padres second baseman Ian Kinsler let the ball fall. He threw out Segura at first with McCutchen caught in a rundown between first and second.

As he tried to get back to first, McCutchen turned awkwardly on his knee while trying to evade the tag being applied by Padres starting pitcher Eric Lauer.

McCutchen came out of the game. Jay Bruce entered to play left field, and Sean Rodriguez moved from left to center.

After three hitless innings, the Phillies took a 1-0 lead in the fourth on a two-out double by Rhys Hoskins and a RBI single by J.T. Realmuto. Three innings later, Realmuto homered for the Phillies' second run. The Padres tied the game at 1-1 on Franmil Reyes' home run off Phillies starter Aaron Nola with one out in the fifth, his 17th of the season.

Nola was still pitching when the Padres started their seven-run sixth. Eric Hosmer opened the inning with a single and moved to second on Wil Myers' one-out single. Ian Kinsler broke the 1-1 tie with a double to right ahead of a bases-filling walk to Austin Hedges. Pinch hitter Josh Naylor followed with a two-run single.

Right-hander JD Hammer replaced Nola and walked Greg Garcia to reload the bases ahead of Machado's 10th homer of the season -- a 388-foot drive to right-center. Lauer (5-4) allowed one run on two hits and three walks with three strikeouts over six innings. Nola (6-1) gave up six runs on eight hits and three walks with five strikeouts over 5 1/3 innings.



San Diego Padres' Manny Machado hits a grand slam home run during the sixth inning against the Philadelphia Phillies at Petco Park. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

STANLEY CUP

# Blues bounce back to square finals with Bruins

AFP  
Los Angeles

Ryan O'Reilly scored twice, including the game winner, to lift the St. Louis Blues to a 4-2 victory over the Boston Bruins and level the Stanley Cup final series at two games each on Monday.

O'Reilly scored the go-ahead marker off a rebound of an Alex Pietrangolo shot halfway through the third period to break a 2-2 deadlock and snap the Bruins' playoff road winning streak at five games.

St. Louis came out blazing from the opening puck drop and never trailed, scoring twice in the third period to break open a tight-checking game four at Enterprise Center in the NHL best-of-seven series.

"Our team responds pretty well to things," said Blues coach Craig Berube. "We knew what we had to do tonight to be a better team."

Boston was hoping to take a stranglehold 3-1 series lead. Instead, they struggled to find offense and were outshot 38-23 overall. Their last loss on the road was game three of the quarter-finals against Columbus.

Russian Vladimir Tarasenko and Brayden Schenn also scored while rookie goaltender Jordan Binnington stopped 21 shots for the Blues, who killed all three of their penalties after allowing four power-play goals in game three. The Blues were blown out 7-2 in game three but they are now 7-2 in games after a loss in the playoffs.

**'WE WERE RELENTLESS'**  
Needing a quick start, St. Louis got it.

O'Reilly won a loose puck from Danton Heinen behind the net and beat Rask with a wraparound at the far post for a 1-0 Blues lead 43 seconds into the game.

"We were relentless tonight. We didn't stop for 60 minutes," Berube said. Charlie Coyle and American Brandon Carlo, with a shorthanded tally, scored for Boston and goaltender Tuukka Rask, of Finland, stopped 34 shots for the Bruins, who lost star defenseman Zdeno Chara for a good chunk of the game after he took a puck to the face. Boston coach Bruce Cassidy said Chara had to be stitched up and would probably need some dental work to fix the damage.

Canadian Binnington rebounded from a sub-par game three to make several key saves. He gave up sloppy rebounds which led to both Boston goals but also made some clutch saves and his defensive work did a better job of shielding him from the Boston scorers.

This was the first time in his young NHL career that Binnington had to start a game after being yanked in the previous one after he surrendered five goals in less than two periods.

Binnington is now 7-2 with a sub-2.00 goals against average in nine games following a loss. On Monday it was Rask's turn to give up some poor rebounds that led to Blues goals by Tarasenko and O'Reilly's game winner.

"He spit some rebounds out," Cassidy said of Rask. "But I don't have an issue with his rebound control."

O'Reilly scored his fourth and fifth goals of the post-season. He is one of 19 Canadians on the Blues roster.

Game five is tomorrow in Boston.



Ryan O'Reilly of the St. Louis Blues celebrates his third period goal against the Boston Bruins in game four of the 2019 NHL Stanley Cup Final at Enterprise Center in St. Louis, Missouri. (Getty Images/AFP)

## CYCLING

# Thomas prepared for tough defence of Tour de France crown

'Everyone's improving. The competition is definitely tougher this year'



Welsh rider Geraint Thomas sets sights on more Tour de France success.

AFP  
London

**T**our de France champion Geraint Thomas says he faces a tougher challenge this year defending his crown as there are so many riders capable of competing for the podium spots.

The 33-year-old Welshman - who upset the form book last year to beat his team-mate and four-time Tour de France champion Chris Froome - told *The Daily Telegraph* he had enjoyed the accolades but he was also

glad that was all over and he had been able to focus on retaining his crown.

Thomas - like Froome riding for Ineos after they stepped in when Sky ended their sponsorship - found himself much in demand from having a selfie with football superstar Lionel Messi to being the main attraction at half-time of Wales's 9-6 win over Australia in their rugby Test last November.

He appears unconcerned by indifferent form thus far this season - third in last month's Tour of Romandie the highlight - saying he will be shipshape

when the race begins in Brussels on July 6. "Though whether that (being in perfect shape) will be enough we will see," said Thomas. "Everyone's improving. The competition is definitely tougher this year.

"There are a lot of guys who could potentially podium.

"I just have to stick to the philosophy I've always had, which is just to do the best I can do.

"I can't affect how (Tom) Dumoulin goes, or Yatesy (Adam Yates) or Richie (Porte) or Jumbo-Visma with Steven Kruijswijk or (Primoz) Roglic."

Thomas, who has just finished

two weeks of altitude training, says the attention he received after his victory - he won the prestigious BBC Sports Personality of the Year award (SPOTY) - had been overwhelming.

"I'm still a bit bowled over by it to be honest," he said.

"I'm surprised by how well the book has done. Winning SPOTY was...incredible.

"That was an amazing night. Especially up against Harry Kane with how England did at the World Cup in Russia.

"Although having said that England didn't really beat anyone did they?"

"And Kane only scored a couple of penalties and a deflection..." he added with trademark impish humour.

However, Thomas, who says he is not far off his optimum racing weight of 67 kilograms (148 lb), knew last November the party circuit was not for him.

"Even though I still had three weeks of doing stuff (appearances), I was itching to get back on the bike," he said.

"That's when I knew I'd be OK.

"Because I knew I didn't want to be doing that (partying) anymore."

## ATHLETICS

## IAAF vows to continue its fight after Swiss court decision on Semenya

DPA  
Berlin

**A**thletics governing body the IAAF said yesterday it would not waver in its quest to keep women's competition fair after a Swiss federal court said South Africa's Caster Semenya was able to run unrestricted while her appeal is considered.

Last month, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) ruled against Semenya's challenge to IAAF rules preventing her from running distances from 400 metres to the mile unless she agrees to take medication to lower her testosterone level.

CAS is meant to be the final tribunal for sports disputes but because it is based in Switzerland, Semenya had the right to appeal to the Swiss Federal Supreme Court.

On Monday it said she should be able to run without having to comply with the new rules while her appeal is heard. The IAAF is waiting for news.

"We have received no information from the Swiss Federal Supreme Court so we can not comment on these proceedings at this stage, but we will continue to fight for what we

believe is in the best interests of all female athletes in our sport," the IAAF said in a statement.

Double Olympic 800m champion from the 2012 London and 2016 Rio Games, Semenya has world titles from 2009, 2011 and 2017 over the distance.

If allowed to compete unrestricted, she will be the massive favourite for another 800m crown at the 2019 worlds in Doha from September 28.

After Semenya burst onto the scene in 2009, she had to undergo gender verification tests. Results were never published but Semenya is believed to be intersex, with a much higher testosterone level than most women.

The IAAF believes this gives her and others like her an unfair advantage and has been developing new rules for years.

However, Semenya and sports bodies in South Africa have slammed the IAAF rules.

Her lawyer Gregory Nott told the local eNCA news channel on Monday that time is ticking for the IAAF.

"The IAAF have until the 25th of June to show cause why the regulations shouldn't be suspended (for good)," he said.

## RUGBY

## Pollard hops back across ocean to rejoin Bulls

Reuters  
Pretoria

**S**pringbok flyhalf Handre Pollard rejoined the Bulls in New Zealand yesterday ahead of their Super Rugby meeting with the Otago Highlanders in Dunedin on Friday.

The game is the last of a four-match tour through Australia and New Zealand. Pollard went home following the first - a much-needed win over the Melbourne Reds - after suffering a calf injury in training.

He missed the subsequent defeat by the ACT Brumbies in Canberra and last Friday's draw with the Auckland Blues, which revived the Bulls' hope of a playoff place.

Coach Pote Human called Pollard the best stand-off in world Rugby and will be counting on his return to give the side a lift amid injury woes.

The Bulls have already lost Duane Vermuelen, who went back to South Africa after the first two matches of the trip in terms of an agreement with SA Rugby to rest him with the World Cup in Japan approaching.



Both Rosko Specman and Paul Schoeman have been ruled out, while there is also concern about Warrick Gelant's availability for the match. Specman sustained a hamstring strain and Schoeman suffered a knee injury in the 22-22 draw last weekend in Auckland.

Both players have returned to South Africa. Fullback Gelant has a hamstring strain, and his availability will be confirmed this week.

The Bulls are third in Super Rugby's South African Conference, seven points off leaders Jaguares, with two matches left in their regular season programme.

Their New Zealand hosts are also still in the running for a wildcard place in the playoffs.

## NFL

# Rams reducing running back Gurley's role in 2019

Reuters  
New York

**A**ll-Pro Todd Gurley likely won't be the workhorse out of the backfield for the Los Angeles Rams this season.

NFL Network's Ian Rapoport reported that the Rams are going to incorporate a number of running backs into the game in 2019, including Darrell Henderson, their third-round draft pick in April.

"The days of Todd Gurley just being the straight-up, every-down bell cow are probably over, just based on his knee, his age, the position, the amount of carries he's had," Rapoport said.

"...This is a team that is clearly ready to spread the ball around." Gurley, entering his fifth season, has carried the ball an average of 260.5 times in each of his first four seasons.

In 2018, he missed the final two games of the regular season but still ran 256 times - good for fourth in the NFL. He turns 25 in August.

The running back saw limited action in the NFC championship game and in Super Bowl LIII, carrying the ball just 15 times combined. He hasn't participated in on-field workouts during offseason practices.

"Of course, Gurley's knee, the wear and tear on that knee, the surgically repaired knee, is something that everyone knows has been concerning to the team for some time," Rapoport said.

"All they really want is for Gurley to come back when the season begins when it's really time to go to be 100 percent. What they don't want is to have all those questions they had leading up to the Super Bowl repeat before Week 1."

**PANTHERS SIGN DT MCCOY** Free agent defensive tackle Gerald McCoy and the Carolina Panthers agreed to a one-year deal on Monday, multiple media outlets reported.

The contract will pay as much as \$10.25 million and includes a \$4 million signing bonus, according to ESPN's Adam Schefter. The Charlotte Observ-

er cited sources indicating that the deal is worth a minimum of \$8.5 million.

McCoy, a six-time Pro Bowl selection, had visited the Panthers, Cleveland Browns and Baltimore Ravens.

Schefter said quarterback Cam Newton helped to sway him toward the Panthers, adding the chance to play his former team - the Tampa Bay Buccaneers - twice a year could have been an incentive.

McCoy, the third overall pick in the 2010 NFL Draft, was released by the Buccaneers on May 20 with three years left on his contract. The deal called for him to make \$13 million in base pay this season. The original contract was for six years and \$95.2 million.

The Tampa Bay Times reported McCoy, 31, drew bids from 10 teams with offers as high as \$11 million annually.

Carolina freed up \$9 million in salary-cap space in the past week by releasing offensive tackle Matt Kalil and restructuring the contract of wide receiver Torrey Smith, Schefter reported.



Gurley won't be Rams workhorse back after knee injury concerns.

NATIONS LEAGUE

# Ronaldo takes centre stage but Portugal's new stars ready to fire

'Cristiano is our leader and it's better to have the best player in the world with us'

AFP  
Porto, Portugal

Cristiano Ronaldo has ended his international exile to spearhead Portugal's hopes of winning the inaugural Nations League on home soil this week, but gone are the days when he was the European champions' only man to fear. A five-time Ballon d'Or and Champions League winner, who has delivered league titles to his clubs in England, Spain and Italy, there is little left for Ronaldo to prove.

But after his tears as a teenager when losing a home final at Euro 2004, Ronaldo can avenge that defeat by lifting the second international trophy of his career in front of an adoring Portuguese crowd.

"We have the privilege of having the best player in the world, who is a scoring machine," said Portugal defender Pepe, who spent many seasons alongside Ronaldo at Real Madrid. "Cristiano is our leader and it's always better to have the best player in the world with us," added veteran centre-back Jose Fonte.

Portugal, though, made it to the final four of the first ever Nations League without their all-time record goalscorer. Ronaldo took a break from international football after the World Cup and only returned for Portugal's first two Euro 2020 qualifiers in March.

His return did not go to plan as Fernando Santos's men were held at home by Ukraine and Serbia, while the Juventus forward limped off injured just 30 minutes into the second fixture of a double header. In his absence, Bernardo Silva has come to the fore with the Manchester City midfielder, who was hailed by club boss Pep Guardiola as the outstanding player in the Premier League this season, also becoming the principal creative force for his country.

City may soon have another Portuguese star on their books with the English champions among a host of clubs chasing Joao Felix. The 19-year-old is in line for his international debut in today's semi-final against Switzerland after a stellar season with Benfica.

Felix scored 20 goals in all competitions, including a Europa League quarter-final hat-trick against Eintracht Frankfurt, with Benfica fearing his 120m euro (\$134m) buyout clause will be activated this summer. That would make him the most expensive Portuguese player ever,



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo trains on the eve of the Nations League semi-final against Switzerland in Porto, Portugal. (Reuters)

even ahead of Ronaldo, but Felix admitted to being star struck on his first few days training alongside the five-time world player of the year.

"It was weird, I had never seen him live so close," Felix said. "I said to my colleagues and best friends later when I got

home that it looked like it was in career mode on PlayStation."

Switzerland do not possess the same star power, although Xherdan Shaqiri will arrive in Porto as a newly crowned European champion at club level with Liverpool. However, Vladimir Petkovic's men

have shown their ability to spring a huge surprise just to make it to the last four.

Needing to beat the number one ranked side in the world, Belgium, by two goals in their final Nations League group game, Switzerland trailed 2-0 before roaring back for a thrilling 5-2 win.

SPOTLIGHT

## Real Madrid snap up Serb starlet Jovic in transfer coup

AFP  
Madrid

Real Madrid said yesterday they have signed 21-year-old Serbia striker Luka Jovic from German side Eintracht Frankfurt on a six-year deal for an undisclosed fee. "Real Madrid and Eintracht Frankfurt have agreed the transfer of Luka Jovic, subject to a medical," Real said in a statement. "The player will be tied to the club for the next six seasons, until the 30th of June 2025," it added.

Jovic scored 27 goals in all competitions this season, helping Frankfurt to the Europa League semi-finals and seventh place in the Bundesliga. He also made four appearances for Serbia, scoring one goal. His dazzling form put him on the radar of Europe's top clubs, with Spanish media quoting a price tag of 60m euros (\$67m) while German media said Real will have paid out 70m euros.

Frankfurt's sporting director Fredi Bobic disclosed no financial details but suggested the size of the Madrid offer was just too big to resist. "In sporting terms, Luka Jovic is a big loss for us," he said in a statement. "It was clear that we would not be able to turn down offers of a certain size."

He said the deal was good for the German club who originally signed Jovic on a two-year loan from Portuguese club Benfica and took up an option for a per-

manent move in April after Barcelona showed interest in the young star. "He has the best perspectives for a brilliant career. We are proud to have helped him on his way," Bobic said.

In the statement, Real highlighted his power, technical ability and prowess as a marksman. The Serb who began his career at Red Star Belgrade finished second top scorer in the Europa League, scoring 10 goals, one less than Chelsea striker Olivier Giroud. The Bundesliga club were beaten by Chelsea in the semi-finals.

In the Bundesliga, Jovic was on target with 17 goals, third in the league rankings along with Kai Havertz of Leverkusen and Marco Reus of Dortmund. Jovic's signature comes ahead of the much-anticipated move to the Santiago Bernabeu of Chelsea star Eden Hazard, who has long been linked to Real and who indicated after the Europa League final victory over Arsenal that he had played his last game for the Londoners.

After years of relative inaction on the transfer market, club President Florentino Perez appears to be keen to put a new gloss on the club's tarnished reputation after a poor season in which they were overshadowed by rivals Barcelona.

His first big move came in March when he persuaded Zinedine Zidane to return as coach after he quit at the end of the 2017-18 season after bringing three Champions League titles in a row to the club.



Serbian forward Luka Jovic scored 27 goals in all competitions this season, helping Eintracht Frankfurt to the Europa League semi-finals and seventh place in the Bundesliga. (AFP)

### Qatar face Guatemala in Toulon tournament

Paris: Qatar Olympic team will take on Guatemala today in the Toulon International tournament. Qatar had lost their opening Group B match against hosts France 0-2 on Monday. After the Guatemala match, they will take on Brazil on June 8.

The two-week tournament is contested by under-22 national teams. This is the sixth time that Qatar is featuring in the tournament. Qatar squad is using the Toulon Tournament to get match practice ahead of the AFC Asian U-23 Cup to be played in Thailand next year. The event in Thailand will act as the qualifier for Olympic

Games in Tokyo 2020. The Qatar team will reassemble after the summer break and is expected to play more matches and events in their build-up to the tournament in Thailand.

On Monday, QFA President Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani met with the players and backroom staff.

ROUND-UP

## Klopp 'pleased' about Bayern link, but hints at Liverpool extension

Jürgen Klopp hinted yesterday that he could remain Liverpool manager for another five years following his Champions League success, in an interview with Germany's *Bild* newspaper.

The former Borussia Dortmund coach did not rule out a future return to the Bundesliga, however, after Franz Beckenbauer urged him to join Bayern Munich earlier this week. Bayern and Germany legend Beckenbauer told *Bild* Monday that he wanted "nothing more" than to see Klopp in the Bayern dugout. Asked about Beckenbauer's comments, Klopp, 51, suggested he could stay at Liverpool for five years or more. "Both Bayern and Borussia Dortmund have very good coaches at the moment. I don't know what the situation will be in five years or beyond. Maybe there are then other coaches who are being considered."

Yet Klopp did not rule out joining Bayern, and said he was "pleased" by Beckenbauer's comments. "Of course it pleases me when Franz says something like that. Better than for him to say I am no good. I like Franz and he likes me. But I have a long-term contract in Liverpool."

Klopp's current contract expires in 2021, and the Premier League club are reportedly seeking to extend it. He also told *Bild* that Liverpool's Champions League triumph on Saturday was "not the beginning of an era of world domination" and that Liverpool still had ground to make up on Europe's biggest clubs.

### LOPETEGUI TAKES OVER AT SEVILLA

Sevilla said yesterday they had signed Julen Lopetegui, who was sacked as Spain coach on the eve of the 2018 World Cup, as manager for the next three seasons. The 52-year-old, who had been out of work since Real Madrid also fired him at the end of October thanks to a dreadful start to the season, will take over from Joaquin Capar-



ros. He will be officially unveiled as Sevilla's new coach on today, the club said in a statement.

Caparros, who has been diagnosed with chronic leukaemia, announced at the end of the season that he would be stepping down. Sevilla finished sixth in La Liga after three defeats in their final six games ruined their chances of qualifying for the Champions League.

Lopetegui's brief and inglorious reign as Real coach ended in humiliation, as he was fired by the club following a 5-1 loss against arch rivals Barcelona. His time at the Santiago Bernabeu lasted just 139 days, with his decision to join the club also costing him his job as Spain boss at the 2018 World Cup in Russia. The Spanish football federation sacked Lopetegui in June 2018 just two days before Spain's opening game with Portugal after it emerged that he had signed with Real without their knowledge. The former Real Madrid goalkeeper has also coached Rayo Vallecano and Porto at the club level.

FOCUS

## Seven Valladolid players paid to lose match: report

AFP  
Madrid

Seven players of Spanish first division side Real Valladolid were paid by a recently dismantled match-fixing gang to deliberately lose their final match of the season against Valencia, *El Mundo* reported yesterday.

Valencia beat Valladolid 2-0 and qualified for the Champions League. Valladolid, owned since September by former Brazilian international Ronaldo, were already safe from relegation. The paper said police had intercepted telephone conversations involving retired footballer Carlos Aranda, who was arrested last week on suspicion of leading the ring, where he is heard saying "there were seven (Valladolid) players bought" in the match.

"Valencia wins the first half and the second, okay?" he is caught saying according to a transcript of another intercepted phone call obtained by the newspaper. Valladolid captain Borja Fernandez is among the players who were paid to lose the match, according to a judicial document obtained by *El Mundo*, which has broken several football-related legal stories. Valladolid announced last week they had opened a disciplinary procedure against Fernandez amid reports that authorities were monitoring Valencia's final day win against the club. "We hope that it is nothing. In any case, I think it is good that we investigate," Ronaldo said last week.

BOTTOMLINE

## China to host 2023 Asian Cup

AFP  
Paris

Asia's football chief Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifah said yesterday that China's staging of the 2023 Asian Cup would serve as a "launchpad" for the country's teams of the future. China was confirmed yesterday as host at the AFC's Extraordinary Congress in Paris after all the other countries in the running dropped their bids, giving the Chinese a possible dry-run for organising a future World Cup.

"This is an important moment for football in Asia and beyond," said Sheikh Salman, FIFA's second-in-command, who was re-elected to a fresh four-year term as AFC president in April.

"Football has the chance to unlock the potential that exists in the world's most populous country. We have seen the rise of the game under the direction and investment of the Chinese government. Now, we have the

chance with this Asian Cup to develop a sure legacy for the global game.

The Asian Cup can provide a launchpad for the great Chinese football teams of the future and more importantly can place football as the number one sport in the country."

Last month South Korea abandoned their bid to stage the tournament, leaving China as the sole candidates with a free run to become hosts. Thailand and Indonesia had also previously expressed interest in hosting the 2023 event, but had dropped out earlier. This year's Asian Cup in the UAE was expanded to 24 nations for the first time with Qatar winning the final.

China's football fan President Xi Jinping has stated his aim for the country to stage the showpiece World Cup one day, with 2030 and 2034 often mentioned as possibilities, and wants the country to become a major force in the sport.

"It's great for China, a great honour for China to be hosts of the 2023 Asian Cup. We are

ready and confident of staging a successful tournament," said Chinese FIFA Council member Du Zhaocai.

It will mark the second time China has hosted the quadrennial continental tournament, after the 2004 edition when they finished runners-up to Japan. The bid proposed 12 candidate cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Xian, and there are plans to construct nine new football-only stadiums by the end of 2021.

China, who have only qualified once for the World Cup in 2002, are ranked a lowly 74th in the world in FIFA's rankings, sandwiched between Panama and Cape Verde. Marcello Lippi was reappointed as coach of China in May, four months after the World Cup winner quit and following a failed stint by fellow Italian Fabio Cannavaro.

Lippi's first match back at the helm will be a home game against the Philippines on June 7, followed by another home friendly, with Tajikistan, four days later. World Cup qualification starts in September.

## SPOTLIGHT

# Federer, Nadal set up French Open semi-final blockbuster

Nadal has a 5-0 stranglehold over Federer at Roland Garros with the Spaniard winning their most recent clash in 2011

AFP  
Paris

Roger Federer set up a mouthwatering French Open semi-final clash with Rafael Nadal yesterday when he defeated Stan Wawrinka in four sets to become the oldest men's Grand Slam semi-finalist in 28 years.

The 37-year-old Swiss beat his compatriot 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 to reach his 43rd major semi-final and eighth at Roland Garros. Defending champion Nadal, bidding for a 12th title at the French Open, blitzed a weary Kei Nishikori 6-1, 6-1, 6-3. Federer trails his head-to-head record with Nadal 23-15 – despite winning their last five matches – and 13-2 on clay.

The Spaniard has a 5-0 stranglehold over Federer at Roland Garros with Nadal winning their most recent Paris clash in the 2011 final. "The complete dream would be to win the tournament," said Federer. "Other players won't agree. It will be difficult, but I believe it anyway. It was hard, really, really hard. Stan played a really good match, I'm really happy to play him here at Roland Garros."

The 20-time Grand Slam champion is the oldest man to make the semis at one of the big four tournaments since Jimmy Connors at the 1991 US Open aged 39. Wawrinka saved 16 of 18 break points in a thrilling encounter, but Federer quickly finished off the match after a rain delay to progress.

It is the third seed's first appearance at the French Open since 2015 after taking time away from clay to focus on Wimbledon, but he has been in fine form in Paris and has only lost one set so far – as has Nadal.

Nadal, who turned 33 on Monday, is three behind Federer in the all-time list of Grand Slam singles titles heading into their 39th career clash. It will be Federer's first Roland Garros semi-final since a defeat by Novak Djokovic in 2012.

The 2009 French Open champion struck 53 winners on Tuesday, as Wawrinka's 61 unforced errors proved costly. In a dramatic opening set on Court Suzanne Lenglen, Federer saved four break points before taking it in a tie-break.

Wawrinka had saved 22 of 27 break points in his epic last-16 victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas, including all eight in the deciding set, and he



Switzerland's Roger Federer (left) hugs countryman Stanislas Wawrinka after winning their men's singles quarter-final match at the French Open in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

was at it again on Tuesday, making it seven from seven to move 3-1 in front in the second.

He suffered from a few jitters when serving to level the match, but took his fourth set point. The topsy-turvy nature of the encounter continued in the third set, as Federer missed two set points before salvaging two break points himself after the players had earlier traded breaks.

Wawrinka held his nerve to force the quarter-final's second tie-break, but Federer moved two sets to one in front on his fifth set point. After the threat of thunderstorms and dark skies forced the players from the court with the fourth set level at 3-3, Federer returned refreshed 80 minutes later and sealed a 23rd victory over Wawrinka in their 26th meeting, despite needing three match points to get over the line.

Nadal took his record in Paris to 91 wins and just two defeats in a one-sided contest with Nishikori to reach his 31st Slam semi-final. "It's a great satisfaction to be in another semi-final, there are lots of emotions," said Nadal. "My level has been very good throughout the tournament and I am happy to be able to come back and

play another day."

Yesterday's win was Nadal's 11th in 13 meetings against Japanese seventh seed Nishikori who had played back-to-back five-setters to reach his third quarter-final at Roland Garros. He had spent four more hours on court than Nadal and the efforts took their toll as he needed treatment on an upper right arm injury after the second set. The 29-year-old Nishikori managed just nine winners in total in the first two sets. As the skies darkened over the city, so did Nishikori's mood as he slipped 4-1 down in the third and again needed the trainer to attend to his arm. Even the weather delay didn't help as Nadal needed just another eight minutes to finish the job.

Johanna Konta became the first British woman in 36 years to reach the semi-finals by sweeping past seventh-seeded Sloane Stephens of the United States, last year's runner-up, 6-1, 6-4. The 28-year-old Konta had not won a match at Roland Garros in any of her previous four visits.

But now she has emulated Jo Durie who was the last British woman to make the French Open semi-finals in 1983. "I've always said that whenever

I step out onto the court, I'm always going to have a chance. I'm always going to have a shot," said Konta. She will play either Czech teenager Marketa Vondrousova or Croatian 31st Petra Martic for a place in Saturday's final.

#### QUARTER-FINALS RESULTS

(x denotes seeding:

Men's: Roger Federer (SUI x3) bt Stan Wawrinka (SUI x24) 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4; Rafael Nadal (ESP x2) bt Kei Nishikori (JPN x7) 6-1, 6-1, 6-3

Women's: Johanna Konta (GBR x26) bt Sloane Stephens (USA x7) 6-1, 6-4

#### TODAY'S ORDER OF PLAY

(play begins at 1pm Qatar time, prefix number denotes seeding):

COURT PHILIPPE-CHATRIER: 3-Simona Halep (Romania) v Amanda Anisimova (US); 1-Novak Djokovic (Serbia) v 5-Alexander Zverev (Germany)

#### COURT SUZANNE-LENGLEN:

14-Madison Keys (US) v 8-Ashleigh Barty (Australia); 4-Dominic Thiem (Austria) v 10-Karen Khachanov (Russia)



Spain's Rafael Nadal plays a forehand en route to his win over Japan's Kei Nishikori. (Reuters)

## FOCUS

# Konta leaves Evert 'speechless' with Roland Garros breakthrough

AFP  
Paris

Johanna Konta became the first British woman in 36 years to reach the Roland Garros semi-finals yesterday in a performance which left US legend and seven-time Paris champion Chris Evert "speechless".

Konta, the 26th seed, swept past seventh-seeded Sloane Stephens of the United States, last year's runner-up, 6-1, 6-4.

"I am speechless and not many matches make me speechless," Evert, an 18-time Grand Slam champion, told Eurosport. "Jo Konta, I take my hat off to you, I have never seen her play that kind of tennis, she would've beaten anybody the way she played today."

The 28-year-old Konta had not won a match at Roland Garros in any of her previous four visits. But now she has emulated Jo Durie who was the last British woman to make the French Open semi-finals in 1983.

"I've always said that whenever I step out onto the court, I'm always going to have a chance. I'm always going to have a shot," said Konta when told of Evert's glowing praise. "I don't think any player on tour can go on court against me and feel like they've definitely got it. I definitely back myself and my ability that way."

Next up for Konta is a clash with either Czech teenager Marketa Vondrousova or Croatian 31st Petra Martic for a place in today's final. It will be her third semi-final at a major after runs to the last-four at the 2016 Australian Open and Wimbledon in 2017.

"I wouldn't say it means more. It's a different process getting here than when I got to the semi-final at Wimbledon or even when I got to the semi-final at Australia,"



Britain's Johanna Konta in action during her quarter-final match against Sloane Stephens of the US at the French Open in Paris yesterday. (Reuters)

added Konta after her third win in 2019 over Stephens. Both players complained about the famed Paris clay blowing away off the court in a stiff breeze. But at least they had the advantage of getting back into the locker room before torrential rain, thunder and lightning brought the men's quarter-finals to a halt later in the day.

Konta broke former US Open champion Stephens in the fourth and sixth games of the first set. The Briton fired four aces and 12 winners past her 26-year-old opponent in the 35-minute opener. Konta tightened her grip with a break in the opening game of the second set and that proved more than

enough. Such was Konta's domination that she allowed Stephens just one point on her serve in the entire second set which ended with a whimper when the American sent a groundstroke wide of the mark.

Stephens, one of three Americans to reach the quarter-finals, admitted that the thin clay surface may have played into Konta's hands.

"Clay is a great neutraliser, but there wasn't very much clay on the court today. So that was a little bit tough," said Stephens. "She likes to play on hard court and grass, and the court was very fast today, and I think that kind of worked in her favour."

## FUTURE FANTASTIC

# Greek lightning: Zverev happy for Tsitsipas to steal spotlight

AFP  
Paris

Alexander Zverev would be overjoyed to finally win a maiden Grand Slam title but just as happy to see rising Greek star Stefanos Tsitsipas also claim a first major. For so long the poster boy of the widely-hyped 'NextGen', but desperately uncomfortable with the burden of expectation, the 22-year-old German has seen Greek rival Tsitsipas edge him out of the spotlight.

"The best thing that could have happened for me is how good Tsitsipas' clay court season was," said Zverev. "I actually do believe that. I'm happy for him."

Tsitsipas, two years Zverev's junior, was seeded sixth at Roland Garros but his hopes of making a second successive last-eight at the majors ended in an epic five-hour defeat by 2015 champion Stan Wawrinka.

Zverev, on the other hand, has made it through to a second successive quarter-final in Paris and will face world number one Novak Djokovic today.

However, he has yet to get past the last-eight at a Slam while Tsitsipas raced to the semi-finals at the Australian Open in January, beating Roger Federer on the way. It took Tsitsipas nine appearances to reach his first Slam quarter-final – Zverev needed 15. "He can be proud. He is a new



superstar all of a sudden. And for me, it was actually quite a nice thing that not all of the attention of the kind of 'NextGen' thing is only going my way."

Not that Zverev's path to the quarter-finals has been smooth. He needed five sets to get past Australia's John Millman in the first round and then four to see off Dusan Lajovic and another four to defeat Fabio Fognini. In contrast, Djokovic has yet to drop a set or even break sweat in reaching a record 10th successive French Open quarter-final. The Serb has conceded an average of just seven games a match.

Zverev had endured a mediocre clay court season until the eve of Roland Garros when he clinched the Geneva title, playing on a last-minute wild card. It was a decision prompted by a quarter-final exit to Tsitsipas in Madrid and a first-up exit at the hands of Italy's Matteo Berrettini in Rome. While he struggled, Tsitsipas

won the title in Estoril, was runner-up to Djokovic in Madrid and made the semi-finals in Rome where it took Rafael Nadal to halt him. The 6ft 6in (1.98m) Zverev admits that his patchy form in 2019 has also been impacted by off-court issues.

He is involved in a legal battle with his former manager which has left him increasingly distracted. "I had to do a lot of things that I usually don't do, a lot of management stuff, a lot of lawyer stuff, so things that I'm not used to doing," he explained. "Those kind of things took my focus away a little bit from tennis. But I'm in the quarter-finals here, so something seems to be working all right now."

Zverev is 2-2 against Djokovic in his career and won their only meeting on clay in the Italian Open final in 2017 in straight sets. He also beat the world number one in the championship match at the 2018 ATP Finals in London.