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FORMULA 1 | Page 4
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GULF TIMES SPORT

TENNIS
Nadal routs Medvedev to win US Open
Page 3

SPOTLIGHT

New technology to boost TV experience for athletics fans during Doha Worlds

Athletics fans around the globe will be closer to the action than ever before as IAAF Productions introduces groundbreaking technology to the broadcast of the IAAF World Athletics Championships Doha 2019, starting on September 27.

The IAAF, with its technology partners and suppliers, has made a concerted push to revolutionise broadcast coverage of athletics at its flagship competition, the biggest sporting event this year, by introducing an array of new cameras that will provide innovative angles on the competition and behind-the-scenes pictures that have never been shown to

the audience before.

In collaboration with the IAAF's long-standing timing partner Seiko, IAAF Productions will launch the world-first technology of Block Cam at Khalifa International Stadium. Two miniature cameras have been installed in each starting block which will provide a new dimension to the coverage of the 100m and sprint hurdles, broadcasting the first pictures of athletes' faces in the moment before they hear the starting pistol, and capturing the explosion of energy as the athletes leave the blocks.

IAAF Director of Broadcast James Lord said his team had been working intensively over

the past year to ensure that the coverage in Doha would be fresh and dynamic.

"Athletics is an extraordinary sport where our athletes do amazing things," Lord said. "There is exceptional life, colour and movement not only in but around the competition and we wanted to showcase all of this to the world in new and exciting ways."

The idea for Block Cam came from IAAF Productions Creative and Live Director Westbury Gillett, who felt the audience was missing a crucial moment of the drama by not being able to see the athletes' faces at the start of sprint races.

"Traditional camera positions only showed the top or side of their heads as they took their marks," Lord explained. "The new cameras within the blocks will capture that intense moment just before a race. Seiko has done a brilliant job of bringing this to life."

Seiko will also introduce an improved Start Video System, video distance measurement for shot put and new LED sand pit event boards which will deliver more information to spectators.

The Chairman and Group CEO of Seiko Holdings Corporation, Shinji Hattori said: "We are very proud of the service that we have created for the IAAF World Ath-

letics Championships Doha 2019.

"Our main responsibility is to deliver accurate, reliable and fast timing and measurement data and we remain 100% focused on this, as our enhanced Start Information System for sprints demonstrates. However, for Doha, we have also invested in new technologies that bring the sport closer to the fans like the 'Block Cam' system, and a new information board for the long and triple jumps. We hope that all of this helps bring new excitement and new fans to the great sport of athletics."

The suite of new cameras being used by IAAF Productions will also include body cameras placed

on officials (in the call room and officiating on the race walks course), drones, rail and wire cameras on the back straight, a rail camera in the tunnel between the warm-up track and stadium, a super slo-mo remote camera in the discus cage, and hand-held cameras for athletes to take on victory laps.

The 2019 World Championships will also see a quantum leap forward in graphic production and analysis, using the combined expertise of Seiko, Hawkeye, Angular Velocity and Deltatre.

These will display the maximum speed reached by sprinters during a race, and their finishing speed, the speed of take off

in long jump, triple jump and pole vault, the distance achieved in each of the three phases of the triple jump, and the speed and angle of release of the long throws.

"We've embraced innovation throughout the Championships, showing more behind-the-scenes footage from the moment the athletes arrive at the stadium, through their whole journey to the end of the Event - and with more than 130 cameras inside and outside the stadium, we can't wait to broadcast these unique Championships to a prospective audience of more than a billion people," Lord added.

- IAAF

FOOTBALL

Qatar favourites but India keep up hope in qualifier

Pre-match niceties apart, it's difficult to see Qatar make any further concessions when the team face off at 7.30pm today

By Sports Reporter
Doha

There's a little bit of hype these days about how Indian football is looking up, but that will count for nothing when they face Qatar in their FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023 qualifier in Doha today.

Qatar's coach Felix Sanchez and some of their players have been at their courteous best, praising the visitors for their recent performances, saying anything can happen on the field of play.

But pre-match niceties apart, it's difficult to see Qatar make any further concessions when the teams face off at 7.30pm at the Sheikh Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

Qatar have a well-earned stature to maintain. For starters they are the Asian champions. Then there is the small matter of them being the hosts of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. The possibility of a defeat to India, ranked 103rd in the FIFA rankings, therefore, will be something of a catastrophe as far as Qatar are concerned.

It was with this mindset that they took on Afghanistan last week, beating them 6-0 thanks to a hat-trick by Almoez Ali and a goal each by Abdelkarim Hassan, Hassan al-Haydos and Boualem Khoukhi.

India's stock went up a notch when they managed to lead Oman for most of their first Group E match last Thursday, but it's also a fact they ran out of steam and conceded two late goals to go down 2-1.

India coach Igor Stimac had made it clear that the team cannot keep on relying on veteran Sunil Chhetri - who scored against Oman - to deliver all the time, asking other players to step up and take responsibility.

India are also thinking about changes - to personnel as well



Qatar coach Felix Sanchez conducts a training session yesterday ahead of today's match against India. PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil



India's goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu (left) and head coach Igor Stimac at a press conference yesterday.

as strategy - to tackle Qatar, but the hosts are not bothered, with Sanchez saying that they have their own priorities.

"We have twin targets in mind...qualify for the 2023 Asian Cup and prepare a good team for the 2022 World Cup," the Spaniard said at his pre-match press conference.

"It is an important game for us. It will be a tough game, but we expect all our 11 players to give their best and play to their best."

"We want our substitutes wherever they are called to take to the field and to play their role to perfection. About making tactical changes we have not decided yet; we have a few things in mind."

Sanchez said he watched India play against Oman last week.

"We have seen how they played in the last match against Oman and we read that they plan to make a few changes from the last match. India have done well in the last few matches and we respect them and we want to give our best."

A self-effacing man that he is, Sanchez played down suggestions that teams like India and Afghanistan can learn a lot from the Asian champions.

"We did not do something ex-

ceptional to achieve success. It is same thing which most of the other countries do. We were successful because we had some talented players which made our job easier of winning the title."

Meanwhile, Stimac, who had coached Al Shahania in the Qatar Stars League, said Qatar hardly had any weaknesses.

"I know the Qatar team pretty well. Their physical strength is great and their technical capabilities and movements are fantastic. It's difficult to find any weak point in their squad," Croatian Stimac stated.

"But in football, everything is possible. You never give up."

Stimac said his players are ready for Qatar despite them having little time to prepare for the match.

"We didn't have much time after the Oman game. Qatar are a very good team. We are trying to give everything on the pitch. So we have been working on the players, and talking to them on how to prepare."

"Fitness is not a concern. Effectiveness of running is important. A more experienced team would have known when and how to run. We were wasting too much of our energy."

SPOTLIGHT

Perfect Spain and Italy close in on Euro 2020

Spain captain Ramos equals Casillas' national appearances record with his 167th cap

AFP
Paris

Spain and Italy moved to within touching distance of Euro 2020 on Sunday night after respective wins over the Faroe Islands and Finland saw them maintain their perfect qualifying records for next year's tournament.

Rodrigo and Paco Alcacer both scored twice in an easy 4-0 victory over the Faroes in Gijon, on a night when captain Sergio Ramos equalled Iker Casillas' national appearances record with his 167th cap. It was their sixth win from six in Group F and put them on a perfect 18 points, seven clear of Sweden, who drew 1-1 with Scandinavian rivals Norway.

With two teams qualifying from the group, they are also a further point ahead of third-placed Romania following their 1-0 win over Malta. "Yes, it's almost done, but not yet mathematically," said Spain coach Robert Moreno when asked if his team had all but qualified with four games to spare.

"We must grow as a team by winning all our matches. Of course, the final goal is qualification, but what matters is that the team has the feeling of doing things well."

The evening began in a sombre fashion with a minute's silence in tribute to former coach Luis Enrique's daughter Xana, who died of bone cancer aged nine last week. Moreno, who took over as boss from Enrique when the ex-Barcelona coach stepped down in June, made 10 changes to the starting XI which won 2-1 in Romania on Thursday, with only Ramos keeping his place.

However the hosts wasted little time in taking the lead, Rodrigo tapping in despite suspicions of offside in the 13th minute following a defensive mix-up, and the Valencia striker put the game to bed five minutes after the break when he lashed a vicious left-footed strike into the top corner with the aid of a deflection.

Substitute Alcacer put the cherry on the cake with two goals in the dying moments, first slotting home from Thiago Alcantara's low cross in the 90th minute before flicking in a near-post header to score his third Spain goal this week.

Italy also kept their 100% record thanks to Jorginho's late penalty, which fired Italy their own sixth straight win, 2-1 at nearest rivals Finland. Chelsea midfielder Jorginho's 79th-minute winner in Tampere sent Roberto Mancini's side six points clear of the second-placed Finns in Group J, after inform Norwich City striker Teemu Pukki



Finland's Jere Uronen (right) and Italy's Federico Chiesa vie for the ball during the Euro 2020 Group J qualification match in Tampere, Finland, on Sunday night. (AFP)

had levelled Ciro Immobile's first Italy goal in two years with a penalty of his own six minutes before.

"I was feeling the pressure of not scoring with this jersey," said Lazio striker Immobile. "But I knew the time would come. Tonight wasn't easy, but we did well. We are happy, we are starting again after the disappointment of missing out on the World Cup."

Four-time world champions Italy are flying high with a maximum 18 points with four qualifying games to play, nine points ahead of third-placed Armenia despite their thrilling 4-2 win over Bosnia and Herzegovina earlier on Sunday.

They could now secure qualification for the tournament, which kicks off in Rome next June, against Greece or

Liechtenstein – who surprisingly drew 1-1 in Athens – next month.

Switzerland kept their hopes of qualifying from Group D alive with a 4-0 thumping of Gibraltar, who are yet to pick up a point or score a goal after five games.

Goals from Denis Zakaria, Admir Mehmedi, Ricardo Rodriguez and Mario Gavranovic were enough to move Vladimir Petkovic's side to within three points of leaders Ireland.

They are also just a point away from second-placed Denmark, who could only manage a goalless draw at Georgia, and have a game in hand on both their rivals.

The Swiss' fate could be decided in the next round of games next month,

when they travel to Copenhagen to take on the Danes before hosting Ireland in Geneva.

EURO 2020 QUALIFYING RESULTS

Group D: At Sion, Switzerland: Switzerland 4 (Zakaria 37, Mehmedi 43, Rodriguez 45+4, Gavranovic 87) Gibraltar 0; At Tbilisi: Georgia 0 Denmark 0

Group F: At Gijon, Spain: Spain 4 (Rodrigo 13, 50, Paco Alcacer 90, 90+3) Faroe Islands 0; At Solna, Sweden: Sweden 1 (Forsberg 60) Norway 1 (Johansen 45); At Ploiesti, Romania: Romania 1 (Puscas 47) Malta 0

Group J: At Yerevan: Armenia 4 (Mkhitarian 3, 66, Hambartsumyan 77,

Loncar 90+5-og) Bosnia & Herzegovina 2 (Dzeko 13, Gojak 70); At Athens: Greece 1 (Masouras 33) Liechtenstein 1 (Salanovic 85); At Tampere, Finland: Finland 1 (Pukki 72-pen) Italy 2 (Immobile 59, Jorginho 79-pen)

Playing today: (all 1845 GMT)

Group A: At Podgorica: Montenegro v Czech Republic (1845); At Southampton: England v Kosovo (1845)

Group B: At Luxembourg: Luxembourg v Serbia (1845); At Vilnius: Lithuania v Portugal (1845)

Group H: At Chisnau: Moldova v Turkey (1845); At Saint-Denis: France v Andorra (1845); At Elbasan: Albania v Iceland (1845)

England's Rice received threats following switch of allegiance

London: England midfielder Declan Rice has revealed threats have been made against him and his family since he switched allegiance from the Republic of Ireland in February. Rice won three senior caps in friendly matches for Ireland before the West Ham star announced at the start of this year he would switch to the country of his birth.

The 20-year-old has quickly become an important part of Gareth Southgate's squad since his controversial decision after representing Ireland at four different age levels. He earned his fourth England cap in Saturday's 4-0 victory over Bulgaria, but the change of nationality did not go down well with some Irish fans, leading to vitriolic online abuse.

"Yeah, I've had a few bad bits," Rice told ITV News when asked about social media attacks. "I've had people saying they're going to come to my house... Yeah online. There's a few bits I could go into, but I don't need to go into it, threats to my family, threats to me."

"You click on their profile and they'd just be a fake profile, so you don't know whether it's true or not. But do you know what? I know, thinking about it now, I was never actually scared about it, because fans are always going to be giving me abuse and whatnot over it. You just kind of look at it and laugh, you think, 'Yeah, all right, as if you're going to come and do that type of thing'."

Rice, whose grand-parents come from County Cork in Ireland, admitted it was harder for his family to deal with the abuse than it was for him. "It was tough, there has been some abuse, it was more for my mum and dad really," he said.

BARCA'S UMTITI SUFFERS FOOT INJURY

Barcelona centre-back Samuel Umtiti has suffered a bruised foot while on international duty with France and could miss this weekend's clash with Valencia, the injury-plagued Spanish champions said yesterday. Ernesto Valverde's men, who host Valencia on Saturday, are already without star forwards Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez due to foot and calf problems respectively. Winger Ousmane Dembele is also sidelined with a hamstring issue, while full-back Nelson Semedo has a sprained ankle.

FOCUS

QFA approves increase in second division clubs



The Qatar Stars League held a co-ordination meeting with QNB Stars League and Second Division League coaches.

The Executive Committee of the Qatar Football Association (QFA) decided yesterday to increase the number of second division clubs to eight from next season by accepting the registration of Al Nasr and Lusail clubs for the first time in the competition.

In doing so, the clubs participating in the new season include Al Kharaitiyat, Al Markhiya, Mesaimmer, Al Shamal, Muaitheer and Al Bidda, in addition to the two new clubs.

The competition system provides for the establishment of the league in two phases. The decision to increase the second division clubs has been done to expand the game and develop the sport to a bigger audience.

QATAR STARS LEAGUE HOLDS MEETING WITH CLUB COACHES

The Qatar Stars League (QSL) held a co-ordination meeting with QNB Stars League and Second Division League coaches at its headquarters in Al Bidda Tower, in line with its policy of continuous consultation and co-ordination between the two parties.

The meeting was attended by Ahmed Khellil Abbassi, Executive Director of Competitions and Football Development at QSL; Ahmed al-Adhani, Director of Competitions Department at QSL; Miguel Heitor, Acting Director of Football Development at QSL; Ali Hamoud al-Nuaimi, Head of Competitions at Qatar Football Association (QFA); and Abdullah al-Balooshi, representative

of QFA's Referees' Committee. Abbassi stressed the importance of having such meetings, development process between QSL and clubs, and increasing the technical level of tournaments and players.

The meeting also discussed a number of important points, such as development of football and key technical observations made by the coaches. Abbassi said: "We met with the coaches to get their views on how to contribute towards the development of league, professionalism and football in general, based on their technical expertise. We've coaches with high technical levels and benefiting from their experience through communication is very important as they're an essential part of the system."

EURO 2020 QUALIFIER

'It's England's turn,' say confident Kosovo, Europe's surprise team

AFP
Pristina

Kosovo will take the field in Southampton today for their first ever international against England as surprise contenders at the top of Group A in Euro 2020 qualification. Recent results have given the team ranked 120th in the world hope of an upset.

"To beat England, we'll have to fight like complete madmen," Swiss coach Bernard Challandes told Kosovo media. It would be a coup for a team that only played their first official international in 2014. "It's going to be difficult," said Frankfurt-born midfielder Besar Halimi, who plays for Sandhausen in the Bundesliga 2. "England has an extraordinary team with players who play in the Champions League every year. You have to take it as an experience, give the best and hope to take points."

Because Serbia disputed Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence, the young country was not fully recognised by the international football bodies until 2015. Kosovo, a poor country of some 2mn inhabitants, made their competitive debut in World Cup qualifying when a penalty by Valon Berisha earned a promising 1-1 draw away to Finland.

They lost their next nine group games scoring only two more goals and conceding another 23. The arrival of Swiss coach Bernard Challandes at the begin-



ning of 2018 stabilised the team. When they gained their first ever international win against Madagascar in March 2018, Albania were ranked 177th out of 221 football nations in the world.

Grouped with other teams from the bottom tier of European football, their debut in a UEFA competition, the Nations League, last year, brought victories over the Faeroes, Azerbaijan and Malta. Topping their group means that, even if Kosovo fail to take one of the top two places in their Euro group, they will have another chance in the playoffs.

Yet, they enter today's game second in Group A, one point behind England and three ahead of the third-placed Czech Republic. On Saturday, they came from behind to beat the Czechs 2-1 in Pristina. "Our team is the Brazil of the Balkans! Kosovo!" said excited local taxi driver Agim Neziri.

The Kosovars kick off at St Mary's Stadium in Southampton on an unbeaten run of 15 games, the longest in Europe. "Our vic-

tory against the Czech Republic was very important," said Swansea midfielder Bersant Celina. "Now it's England's turn."

They beat Bulgaria 3-2 in Sofia with a goal three minutes into added time by substitute Elbasan Rashani. Then they came from behind against the Czechs without two injured pillars, midfielder Arber Zeneli and Werder Bremen forward Milot Rashica.

Both will be missing against England. Fenerbahce's Vedat Muriqi scored against both Bulgarians and Czechs. The young team is built around children of the widespread Kosovan diaspora. People fled first the rule of Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic in the 1990s, then the war of independence from Serbia in 1998-99 and also from a fragile economy.

Many talented Kosovo qualified players had already locked themselves into representing other countries, such as Lorik Cana of Albania and Swiss internationals Granit Xhaka, Valon Behrami and Xherdan Shaqiri.

Rashani, the hero of Sofia, and Zeneli were born in Sweden. Rashani plays in Norway, Zeneli for Reims in the French first division. In total, the squad, which has an average age of just 23, is drawn from 14 different leagues, though now play in the Superleague of Kosovo. "United, with the help of our supporters, Kosovo can achieve great things," said captain Amir Rrahmani, a defender who plays for Hellas Verona in Serie A.

US OPEN

Nadal edges out Medvedev in thriller; bags 19th Slam title

It was the second Slam title of the year for Nadal after taking his 12th French Open crown in June

AFP
New York

Rafael Nadal captured his 19th career Grand Slam title in thrilling fashion on Sunday by winning the US Open final, outlasting Russia's Daniil Medvedev 7-5, 6-3, 5-7, 4-6, 6-4 to seize his fourth crown in New York.

The 33-year-old Spanish left-hander moved one shy of Roger Federer's all-time men's record 20 Grand Slam triumphs and became the second-oldest New York champion in the Open era after Ken Rosewall in 1970 at age 35.

"(It) has been one of the most emotional nights in my tennis career," Nadal said. World number two Nadal took the top prize of \$3.85mn at Arthur Ashe Stadium and added to his US Open trophy haul from 2010, 2013 and 2017.

Nadal, who was in his fifth US Open championship match and 27th Grand Slam final, is the first man to claim five major titles after turning 30.

But it took a supreme effort from the Spanish maestro, who nearly became the first player to drop the final after leading by two sets since Ted Schroeder in 1949.

"This victory means a lot," Nadal said. "And the way it happened. It was hard to control the nerves. The nerves were so high after having the match almost under control."

Nadal, who rose to 22-12 in five-set matches, only lost once at a Slam when up two sets, to Italy's Fabio Fognini in the 2015 US Open third round.

"I more or less had the match under control," Nadal said. "The way he was able to fight, to change the rhythm of the match, was incredible."

At four hours and 50 minutes, the match finished four minutes short of equalling the longest final in US Open history from Mats Wilander's 1988 win and Andy Murray's 2012 title. It was the second Slam title of the year for Nadal after taking his 12th French Open crown



Rafael Nadal holds the trophy after his win over Daniil Medvedev at the US Open on Sunday. (AFP)

in June. In addition to reaching the brink of Federer's mark, Nadal moved one shy of the Open era record five US Open titles won by Federer, Jimmy Connors and Pete Sampras.

"A 19th Grand Slam title is something

unbelievable, outrageous," Medvedev said.

Nadal, who won his only prior meeting with Medvedev in last month's Montreal final, stretched his win streak over Russians to 20 matches since los-

ing to Nikolay Davydenko in the 2011 Doha semi-finals.

Fifth seed Medvedev, 23, would have been the youngest men's Grand Slam champion since Juan Martin del Potro at the 2009 US Open.

Medvedev, who will rise to a career-best fourth in the rankings, was a champion at Cincinnati and runner-up at Montreal, Washington and the Open.

"His summer was one of the best summers I ever saw," Nadal said. "People saw why he is already number four in the world."

Medvedev, who saw his career-best 12-match win streak snapped, would have been the first Russian to win a Grand Slam title since Marat Safin at the 2005 Australian Open and the first Russian to win the US Open since Safin in 2000.

ELECTRIC FIFTH SET

On a knife's edge at 5-5 in the third set, Medvedev reeled off eight of the last nine points to force a fourth, breaking Nadal in the 12th game with a backhand winner.

"To be honest in my mind, I was already thinking, 'What do I say in the speech, it's going to be in 20 minutes,'" Medvedev said.

"I was like I have to fight for every ball, and it went further but it didn't go my way."

Nadal was broken in the 10th game of the fourth set to force a fifth when Medvedev blasted a sterling backhand return winner.

Nadal rescued three Medvedev break chances to hold in the second game of the fifth set, fired a backhand volley winner to break Medvedev in the fifth game and seized a 5-2 edge when Medvedev hit an overhead smash long.

Serving for the match, Nadal was broken when umpire Ali Nili issued Nadal a time violation for his first serve and the Spaniard sent his second long, the crowd booing Nili for his call. Nadal squandered two break and match points in the ninth game as the drama intensified.

Again serving for the match, Nadal rescued a break point then hit a forehand drop volley for his third match point chance and Medvedev sent a forehand return long to end matters.

ZHENGZHOU OPEN

Kenin, Garcia advance to second round

Reuters
Beijing

Sofia Kenin staved off a late comeback attempt by Chloe Paquet to defeat the Frenchwoman 6-2, 7-5 and reach the second round of the inaugural Zhengzhou Open yesterday.

Sixth seed Kenin, seeking a third WTA title this year following triumphs in Hobart and Mallorca, rallied from a break down in the second set to close out the win after 83 minutes in sweltering conditions.

"Chloe is a tough player. I lost to her in Strasbourg, so I knew I needed to figure out a way to win," Kenin, who next plays local hope Lu Jingjing or Alize Cornet, said.

"Conditions are really hot. I'm kind of used to it... but it's not easy. I'm happy to have gotten through it."

Eighth seed Caroline Garcia overcame a mid-match wobble to overcome Czech Republic's Tereza Martincova 6-4, 4-6, 7-5 while Petra Martic beat Italy's Jasmine Paolini 7-5, 6-1.

Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva battled past Tamara Zidansek 6-1, 5-7, 6-1 in a rematch of this year's Nuremberg Cup final to move into the second round. Three-times Grand Slam champion Angelique Kerber, who was beaten in the opening round of the US Open, is among the main contenders in Zhengzhou having taken a wildcard to compete in the first Premier event of the Asian swing.

Former world number one Karolina Pliskova is the top seed at the tournament ahead of Ukraine's Elina Svitolina.

SPOTLIGHT

Andreescu jumps into top five



Bianca Andreescu poses with her trophy at top of the Rock in New York on Sunday. (Reuters)

AFP
Paris

US Open winner Bianca Andreescu, 200th in the world rankings a year ago, leapt into the top five yesterday, while Ashleigh Barty knocked Naomi Osaka off top spot.

Eliminated in the first qualifying round in New York a year ago, Andreescu rose 10 places to number five after beating Serena Williams in the final on Saturday.

The 19-year-old Canadian is one place behind Osaka, whose defence of her US title ended in the quarter-finals.

Barty was also knocked out in the last eight but, since she was knocked out in the fourth round in 2018, increased her ranking points total.

The Australian is just over 400 points ahead of the Czech Karolina Pliskova, who climbed one place to second.

The top two have opened a substantial gap over Elina Svitolina, who rose two spots to third after reaching the semi-finals in New York.

Clay maniac Nadal finds unlikely second home at US Open

AFP
New York

Unlike at his beloved Roland Garros, success did not arrive overnight for Rafael Nadal on the unforgiving hard courts of the US Open, where he surged to within a title of Roger Federer's all-time men's Grand Slam singles record Sunday.

Nadal's epic victory over Daniil Medvedev secured the Spaniard his fourth US Open crown, leaving him one shy of the Open era record of five

titles belonging to long-time rival Federer, Pete Sampras and Jimmy Connors.

But it was not an instant connection between Nadal, his notoriously suspect knees, and the year's final Grand Slam tournament.

"I think at the beginning of my career have been some tough moments here, losing matches," said Nadal, who failed to reach a single semi-final in his first five trips to the US Open. During that span, Nadal would claim at least one singles title at the other three majors, but it was not until his eighth visit to Flush-

ing Meadows that he would get his hands on an elusive US Open trophy.

"Since a long time ago, every time that I came here I felt comfortable. I felt very competitive and fighting for the big things," Nadal said during his run to a second US Open title in three years.

"I feel comfortable here, I like the atmosphere, I like the crowd. I feel a big energy when I am playing in this Arthur Ashe Stadium."

Nadal's latest coronation, his 19th Grand Slam title, reinforced the fact the slower courts of the US Open and his

obliging knees have turned New York into a land of opportunity. Vanquished opponents this past fortnight struggled to find superlatives befitting the 33-year-old as he capped one of his greatest Grand Slam years in thrilling style.

Diego Schwartzman suggested Nadal was "like a lion in the middle of the jungle" while Matteo Berrettini called him "the greatest fighter ever in this sport."

"It's tough to find words. He's one of the greatest champions in the history of our sport. He's just a machine, a beast on the court," Medvedev

said. Nadal's Grand Slam CV boasts 12 French Opens, four US Open titles, two at Wimbledon and one at the Australian Open.

Tennis has been good for Nadal but he has been just as influential as a key driver of the sport's growth. Only Nadal and Andre Agassi can say they have a career Grand Slam and an Olympic men's singles gold medal, Nadal having claimed his in 2008 at Beijing.

Knee and wrist injuries have taken a toll throughout his career, however, costing him nine Slam appearances.

After he failed to even reach a Slam semi-final in 2015 and 2016 some figured his greatest moments were behind him.

But Nadal roared into the 2017 Australian Open final, losing to Federer, then captured a record 10th French Open crown in June that year, setting the stage for another title run at the US Open.

Those struggles receded further into distant memories this year as he reached the semi-finals at all four majors for the first time since 2008, his five-set win over Medvedev moving him a step closer to history.

BOTTOMLINE

Medvedev proud despite 'amazing summer' ending with final loss

AFP
New York

Daniil Medvedev said he was incredibly proud of a remarkable six-week hardcourt run in North America that culminated with Sunday's agonizing five-set loss to Rafael Nadal in the US Open final.

Medvedev became just the third man to reach finals at Washington, Canada, Cincinnati and the US Open in the same summer, but like those before him - Ivan Lendl (1982) and Andre Agassi (1995) - he too finished runner-up in New York.

"It was an amazing match. It's an amazing story. All this summer is amazing for me. I will remember every moment of it," Medvedev said.

"I have a really good memory if we talk about tennis. I'll definitely remember it even when

I'm, like, 70 years old." Medvedev, who won his first Masters title last month in Cincinnati, will climb to a career high of fourth in the ATP rankings.

"After the summer I had no fear. I had everything to win. I think it's Rafa who had something to lose. I went out there, I gave everything I could, and I'm proud of myself," Medvedev said.

"He was the better one today. I have to admit it. I have no regrets."

The Russian, a first-time Grand Slam finalist, joked he was thinking of what to say during the trophy presentation after losing the first two sets to Nadal. But Medvedev, spurred on by an electric Arthur Ashe Stadium crowd, tapped into his energy reserves to launch a stirring fightback that had Nadal up against the ropes.

After levelling the final at two sets apiece, Medvedev missed

three break point chances in the second game of the decider. He looked beaten after going a double break down, but retrieved one and erased two match points, creating an opportunity to get back on serve as Nadal served for the title a second time.

'CLOSE TO WINNING'

"Was I close to winning? Yes, one set away. I mean, had break points at 5-4. I will remember everything of it. I will be disappointed with the result, but I will be happy with the way I played, as I say, the whole summer, the whole US Open," Medvedev said.

"My wife always tells me that I have to be happy about myself sometimes, because I'm really self-criticising. For example, tonight I'm not happy to lose, but I have to give myself credit for these two weeks. It's been amazing."

"Before the tournament, my

best result was fourth round of a Slam. I had some physical problems. Sometimes I didn't play as good as I wanted. But I managed to be in the final. I managed to give huge fight to one of the best players in the history of our sport."

Nadal's victory extended the dominance of the "Big Three" with the last 12 major titles won by the Spaniard, Novak Djokovic or Roger Federer.

Medvedev was attempting to become the first man born in the 1990s to win a Grand Slam title. Milos Raonic lost the Wimbledon final in 2016 while Dominic Thiem finished runner-up to Nadal at the French Open the past two years.

"I can say that I'm sure all of us, we're fighting our best to try to make this transition. It's really tough because these guys, they are playing good tennis. I don't know what else to say. They are just playing amazing tennis," Medvedev said.



Daniil Medvedev gestures during his final match against Rafael Nadal at the US Open on Sunday. (AFP)

FORMULA 1

Hamilton would have hit Leclerc had title not been in play

Reuters
Monza

Formula One leader Lewis Hamilton said he would have been far tougher with Ferrari's Italian Grand Prix winner Charles Leclerc on Sunday had the Mercedes driver not been fighting for his sixth world championship.

"I wouldn't have moved. We would have collided," the Briton said of an incident where he was squeezed off track and forced to cut

a corner by the 21-year-old Monégasque in an aggressive defensive move. Hamilton ended the day 63 points clear of his closest rival and Finnish teammate Valtteri Bottas, who finished second, with seven of 21 races remaining.

Leclerc won Ferrari's home race from pole position, with Hamilton putting him under plenty of pressure until his Mercedes's tyres had no life left in them.

Hamilton ended up third, but with a precious extra point for fastest lap.

Leclerc, who has won the last

two races, is fourth overall but 102 points behind the Briton and only mathematically in title contention against a rival who has finished all but two races this season on the podium.

"There is absolutely zero issue with us, I think he did an exceptional job today," Hamilton told reporters after the race when asked about the incident.

"If we get a moment together we might chat for a second and just reverse roles and make sure he's cool with it if I'm in that position and that happens.

"If that's cool, then that's how we are racing."

Hamilton said he respected Leclerc but he was still discovering more about how the youngster, in only his second season and first with Ferrari, behaved on track.

"Charles is one of the most respectful drivers," he added. "This is today the first time I've really come wheel to wheel with him as such and when you arrive at a new driver you learn how they approach different scenarios.

"Maybe I'll position the car differently next time, maybe I'll do a

better job."

Bottas, who pitted later and had fresher tyres than Hamilton at the end, moved into second place after Hamilton went straight at the chicane.

The Briton said he would have let the Finn go past otherwise.

"I knew that he was much, much quicker and had a shot to potentially win the race," he said. "I think that's the most important point for the team.

"So in hindsight I didn't have to do that (let him overtake)," he smiled.



Lewis Hamilton (L) with Charles Leclerc after the qualifying session at the Autodromo Nazionale circuit in Monza on September 7.

FOCUS

Leclerc is now Ferrari's 'forgiveness' favourite

The 21-year-old's victory at the Italian GP triggered scenes of intense emotion at Ferrari's home race

Reuters
Monza

Sebastian Vettel was supposed to be the man to follow in Michael Schumacher's footsteps at Ferrari but the heir apparent to the master of Maranello is looking more and more like Charles Leclerc.

The 21-year-old Monégasque's victory at the Italian Grand Prix on Sunday triggered scenes of intense emotion at Ferrari's home race and catapulted Leclerc ahead of Vettel in the standings.

The newspaper headline writers left no doubt about the prevailing sentiment yesterday.

"Reclerc" declared the front page of the daily *Gazzetta dello Sport*, playing on the Monégasque's surname with the Italian word for king and announcing the coronation of the team's 'little prince'.

Vettel, a four times world champion who endured a bleak afternoon at Monza and was lapped by his teammate after collecting a 10 second stop/go penalty for dangerous driving, was highlighted as a man in crisis.

The victory at Monza was Leclerc's second in a row, following on from his breakthrough in Belgium the previous weekend, but the first by a Ferrari driver since 2010.

Tellingly perhaps, the last Ferrari driver to take back-



Ferrari's Charles Leclerc celebrates his victory with Ferrari team principal Mattia Binotto and teammates in Monza on Sunday.

to-back wins in Belgium and Italy, Formula One's two fastest tracks, was Schumacher in his debut season with the team in 1996. Leclerc, too, is in his first season with Ferrari, a team celebrating their 90th anniversary, and two thirds of

the way through the campaign the youngster is ahead of Vettel on points, poles, podiums and wins.

Leclerc also showed in Monza that – like most great drivers including seven times world champion Schumacher

– he can be fearless but also selfish and ruthless when it suits his purposes.

Team boss Mattia Binotto alluded to this when he congratulated him over the team radio at the finish by saying 'you are forgiven', referring

to shenanigans in Saturday's qualifying.

Leclerc had taken pole on the basis of his first fast lap in the final shootout, with the final minutes descending into farce with no driver willing to take the lead and allow others to slipstream.

Within Ferrari, sources said, it had been agreed that Leclerc would give Vettel the necessary tow but that never happened and the German was not impressed. In the race, Leclerc also showed he was willing to push the rules to the limit – triggering a black and white warning flag, the equivalent of a yellow card in soccer, when he squeezed Mercedes's Lewis Hamilton off the track.

"The racing was very hard, maybe over the line – and Lewis I think was instrumental in not making it an incident," commented Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff.

"But at the end of the day, what do you do? You give a leading Ferrari in Monza a five-second penalty? Out of the question... because then we need a police escort out of here."

Leclerc, like the Schumacher of old, was aggressive and single-minded after seizing his chance and starting from pole position.

Unlike the German, he addressed the crowd afterwards in fluent Italian. The crowd had no need for forgiveness, they already had their favourite.

BOTTOMLINE

Vettel in danger zone for ban after Monza mistakes

Reuters
Monza

Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel has entered the danger zone for a race ban after falling foul of Formula One stewards on a nightmare Italian Grand Prix Sunday for the German.

The four-times world champion was handed three penalty points for dangerous driving in his team's home race, taking his tally to nine.

Any driver who amasses 12 points in a 12 month period is banned for one race automatically, and Vettel has three more grands prix to go before he starts to shed any of those accrued to date.

Three points is the maximum the stewards can hand out, with that penalty reserved for the most serious incidents.

There was little doubt Vettel's misdemeanour was of that magnitude, with the German spinning off at As-

cari before compounding his unforced error by returning to the track clumsily and without making sure the road was clear.

Canadian Lance Stroll, in the Racing Point, was unable to avoid a glancing contact and went spinning off, returning in an equally alarming fashion and almost colliding with Toro Rosso's Pierre Gasly.

Vettel was also handed a 10 second stop/go penalty, dropping him to the back of the field.

To add salt in the wounds, he was then lapped by race winning teammate Charles Leclerc and finished 13th – his second blank in five races.

"I made a mistake and lost the car," he told reporters. "After that, the race was a bit different."

"Coming back (on track), I knew there would be a gap but I struggled a little bit to get out... I think I was stuck on the grass and lost a bit of momentum there and that took a little bit longer. I couldn't see

anything.

"Obviously on my side I'm not happy. I can't be happy with my day today."

Vettel has not won a race for more than a year, his last being at the Belgian Grand Prix in August 2018.

He also spun at Monza last year after starting on the front row and then colliding with Mercedes rival Lewis Hamilton on the opening lap. He fought back from 18th to fourth on that occasion.

His temperament has been increasingly questioned, however, over the past year with some pundits accusing him of cracking under pressure and making mistakes unworthy of a multiple champion.

Asked by Sky Sports television whether he was falling out of love with the sport, the 32-year-old replied: "No, not really, I haven't."

"Of course I still love what I do, but surely when you're not doing well what you know you can do well, you can't be happy?"

Haas F1 team parts company with title sponsor Rich Energy

Monza: Haas F1 and title sponsor Rich Energy have parted company after 14 races together, the US-owned Formula One team announced yesterday. A Haas spokesman said the cars would retain the black and gold livery for the rest of the season but without the energy drink company's branding. "Haas F1 Team and Rich Energy have amicably agreed to end their partnership together in the FIA Formula One world championship with immediate effect," the team said in a statement.

It said Rich Energy needed a revised global strategy due to a 'corporate restructuring process' and a termination of the agreement was best for both

parties. The title sponsorship had been in doubt for some time, with Rich Energy posting on Twitter in July that they had terminated the contract. Shareholders later said in a statement issued by the team that those comments were unauthorised and the 'rogue actions' of one individual. Haas, the only US-owned entry in Formula One, are ninth of 10 teams after Sunday's Italian Grand Prix with Danish driver Kevin Magnussen and Frenchman Romain Grosjean. In May, Rich Energy lost a court case brought against it in Britain by Whyte Bikes for copyright infringement of its stags head logo, which was removed from the F1 cars.

RUGBY

'Dealing with typhoons part of World Cup experience'

Reuters
Kashiwa

Typhoons are just one of the many challenges world champions New Zealand will have to contend with at the upcoming Rugby World Cup, head coach Steven Hansen said after his team's arrival in Japan was disrupted by the aftermath of typhoon Faxai.

The storm, one of the strongest to hit eastern Japan in recent years, struck shortly before dawn yesterday, killing one woman, damaging buildings and severely disrupting transport.

More than 160 flights were cancelled, causing chaos at both of Tokyo's major airports.

With the world's top rugby teams arriving this week ahead of the World Cup that begins on Sept. 20, New Zealand, England and Australia were all caught up in the post-typhoon disorder.

Australia had to delay their arrival by a whole day, while England were left stranded at Tokyo's Narita airport for five hours.

New Zealand were more fortunate, managing to get to their hotel in Kashiwa, north of Tokyo, after a two hour delay.

Coach Steve Hansen shrugged off any concerns about future storms disrupting the tournament, which takes place during Japan's notorious typhoon season.

"They are all things we know about and we have planned for so

no more concerns," said Hansen. "Part of our planning is understanding what we are coming into. We are well aware of what we could get."

Despite the delay, hundreds of All Blacks fans waited outside the hotel to greet their heroes, with children performing a haka and a choir singing local and New Zealand songs.

The players appeared a little overwhelmed by the experience after their long journey.

"A fantastic welcome, mind-blowing really," said Hansen, who also exchanged gifts with Kashiwa's mayor.

"Seeing the kids and the enjoyment on their faces was really exciting."

Favourites New Zealand come into the tournament looking to make history as the only team to win three consecutive World Cups.

They begin their campaign against South Africa on Sept. 21. "You are expected to win all the time so you have to make a choice whether you sink or you stand up," Hansen said.

"For us, it is about getting excited about trying to do something that nobody else has ever done before and we are the only team at this tournament that can do it."

"So, it is an unique challenge to us and if we really embrace that, like I said before, and have fun doing it then that helps you deal with all the pressure that comes with it."

Ex-All Black Robinson to take over as NZ Rugby chief

Wellington: New Zealand Rugby named former All Blacks centre Mark Robinson as its new chief executive yesterday, saying he will work with outgoing boss Steve Tew at the upcoming Rugby World Cup in Japan. Robinson, the first former All Black to hold the governing body's top job, played nine Tests for New Zealand from 2000-2002 in an international career that was plagued by injury. The 45-year-old also won two Super Rugby titles with the Canterbury Crusaders, but cut short his professional career to study philosophy and political

science at Britain's Cambridge University. "I have a clear vision to continue to grow the great work already established under Steve's watch," he said. "I recognise the significant responsibility we have in ensuring our game continues to flourish at all levels." NZR said Robinson would formally take over in January but the transition will begin immediately as he accompanies Tew to the World Cup, where the All Blacks are chasing a third straight title. Tew announced his departure in June after 12 years at the helm, saying it was time for "new blood".

NFL

Pats stomp Steelers, Chiefs beat Jags despite losing Hill

'The defence played great and gave us a lot of opportunities'

AFP
Los Angeles

Tom Brady passed for three touchdowns and 341 yards as the New England Patriots began the defence of their Super Bowl title with a 33-3 rout of Pittsburgh in a bruising opening Sunday of the NFL season.

The 42-year-old Brady completed 24 of 36 passes and improved to 6-0 at home against the Steelers.

He threw two touchdown passes to Phillip Dorsett and one to Josh Gordon. Stephen Gostkowski added four field goals.

"The defence played great and gave us a lot of opportunities," said Brady. "We made some big plays on the pass game."

The Patriots, who held a pregame ceremony to celebrate their championship, started quickly leading 7-0 after the first quarter and 20-0 at halftime.

Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger was 27 of 47 for 276 passing yards, and an interception.

The win comes just days before the Patriots add Antonio Brown to their lineup. New England reportedly has guaranteed the wide receiver \$9 million this season.

Brown, a four-time All-Pro and one of the league's most dynamic pass catchers, is not eligible to be signed officially until Monday.

RESULTS

Patriots	33-3	Pittsburgh
Buffalo	17-16	Jets
Baltimore	59-10	Miami
Kansas City	40-26	Jacksonville
Tennessee	43-13	Cleveland
Philadelphia	32-27	Washington
Minnesota	28-12	Atlanta
Rams	30-27	Carolina
Chargers	30-24	Indianapolis
Cincinnati	20-21	Seattle
Detroit	27-27	Arizona
Dallas	35-17	Giants
San Francisco	31-17	Tampa Bay

Brady said he hopes the Patriots can find a receiver role for Brown. "It is about getting him up to speed," Brady said.

"He is a great player and we are excited to have him. I played against him for a long time."

"We will try to incorporate him into the lineup the best way we can."

Elsewhere, reigning Most Valuable Player Patrick Mahomes threw for 378 yards and three touchdowns to lead the Kansas City Chiefs to a 40-26 victory over the Jacksonville Jaguars.

Sammy Watkins grabbed nine passes for a career-high 198 yards and three touchdowns, taking over as the top target for Chiefs quarterback Mahomes after Tyreek Hill departed with a shoulder injury days after he inked a three-year, \$54 million (48.9 million euros) deal last week.

Hill was later transported to hospital with what Chiefs head trainer Rick Burholder called a "sternoclavicular joint injury which is where your clavicle comes into your sternum".

The news was possibly worse for the Jaguars, who lost quarterback Nick Foles to a broken left clavicle less than a quarter into his debut. Jaguars coach Doug Marrone said there was no timetable for Foles's return after surgery expected on



New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady passes the ball against the Pittsburgh Steelers during the first-half at Gillette Stadium. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

Monday. "It was unfortunate," Marrone said. "You'd really like to see how the game would've worked itself out with Nick."

In his absence, rookie sixth-round pick Gardner Minshew threw for 275 yards and two touchdowns in an outstanding debut that still wasn't enough. "I was really proud of him for stepping up," Foles said after the game, talking to reporters with his arm in a sling. "And I'm going to be here to help him any way possible."

Los Angeles Rams safety Eric Weddle suffered a frightening head laceration in his team's 30-27 win over the Panthers in Carolina.

Weddle was carted off the field in the first half to have treatment for the bloody wound and a concussion evaluation.

With less than six minutes left in the second half, Weddle attempted to tackle

Panthers running back Christian McCaffrey as he rushed toward the right sideline. McCaffrey tried to hurdle over Weddle and ended up catching him with a knee to the right side of his helmet.

RAVENS SOAR

Early division clashes saw the Baltimore Ravens run riot in a 59-10 victory over the Dolphins in Miami, where Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson threw for a career-high 324 passing yards and a club-record five passing touchdowns. He connected on 17 of 20 passes for a club-record 85 percent completion rate.

The high-flying Ravens offense saw tight end Mark Andrews record eight catches for 108 yards - both career highs. Rookie wide receiver Marquise "Hollywood" Brown reeled in four catches for 147

yards, and two touchdowns. In Philadelphia, the Eagles rallied for a 32-27 victory over NFC East rivals Washington, battling back from deficits of 17-0 and 20-7 with three straight second-half touchdowns and a field goal on four possessions.

There were a couple of other big comebacks, including for the Buffalo Bills, who rallied from a 16-0 deficit to beat the New York Jets 17-16 at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

Kyler Murray and the Arizona Cardinals nearly finished an improbable comeback on the rookie's debut, rallying from an 18-point deficit in the fourth quarter to tie the 24-24 at the end of the fourth quarter.

The Cardinals had two chances to win in overtime and so did the Lions, but all they could do was trade field goals and settle for a 27-27 tie.

MLB

Astros erupt for 21 runs against Mariners as Cole cruises

Reuters
Houston

The Houston Astros hammered the visiting Seattle Mariners for 21 runs on 22 hits, and Gerrit Cole set a single-season standard for strikeouts in a 21-1 rout on Sunday afternoon to complete a four-game series sweep.

Houston scored four in the second inning, nine in the third, two in the fifth, one in the sixth and five in the seventh for the runaway win.

Cole (16-5) extended his winning streak to 12 by surrendering one run on one hit with a season-high 15 strikeouts over eight dominant innings. His strikeout of Seattle right fielder Keon Broxton in the sixth inning was his 11th of the game and 277th on the season, eclipsing the 276 strikeouts he recorded in 2018, his first season with the Astros.

Cole extended his franchise record of double-digit strikeout performances to 17 this season, including five in succession. He became the second pitcher in his history with at least 14 strikeouts in three consecutive starts (Pedro Martinez, 1999). He threw 96 pitches on his 29th birthday.

The Astros improved to 16-1 against Seattle this season, a mark that includes a 10-0 record at home. Houston is 16-4 over its last 20 games and matched its franchise record with its 55th home victory this season. The Astros are 27-4 over their last 31 games at Minute Maid Park.

Mariners veteran right-hander Felix Hernandez (1-6) was partially undone by a fielding error from shortstop Dee Gordon that allowed Kyle Tucker and Abraham Toro to score and Martin Maldonado to reach base with two outs in the second. On his ensuring pitch to Jake Marisnick, Hernandez surrendered a 432-foot blast to left that allowed Houston to extend its lead to 4-0.

Hernandez did not retire any of the seven batters he faced in the third. Jose Altuve,

Aledmys Diaz, Tucker, Alvarez and Maldonado doubled off Hernandez during the onslaught, with Alvarez plating Altuve and Alex Bregman with his double to right while Diaz, Tucker and Maldonado notched an RBI apiece.

Hernandez departed after Maldonado plated Tucker, but the Astros kept piling on against reliever Erik Swanson, including a George Springer three-run homer, his 31st.

Houston sent 14 batters to the plate during the nine-run third. The Astros capped the afternoon with a club-record 11 doubles, three from Alvarez (4-for-6, six RBIs). Springer added four RBIs.

RESULTS

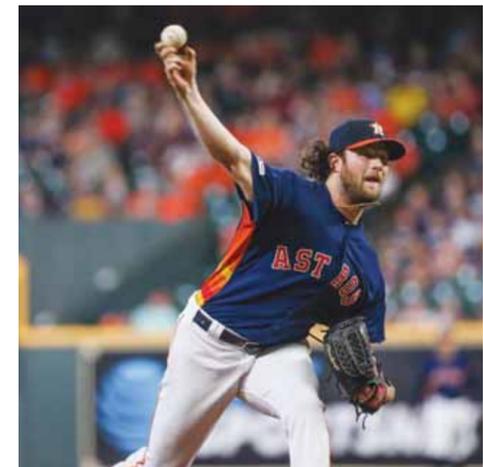
Astros	21-1	Mariners
Padres	2-1	Rockies
Dodgers	5-0	Giants
Yankees	10-5	Red Sox
Marlins	9-0	Royals
Athletics	3-1	Tigers
White Sox	5-1	Angels
Brewers	8-5	Cubs
Indians	5-2	Twins
Cardinals	2-0	Pirates
Reds	4-3	D'backs
Phillies	10-7	Mets
Rays	8-3	Blue Jays
Rangers	10-4	Orioles
Nationals	9-4	Braves

MYERS SINGLE PUSHES PADRES PAST ROCKIES

Wil Myers singled home Manny Machado with one out in the bottom of the 10th inning to lift the San Diego Padres to a 2-1 win against the visiting Colorado Rockies on Sunday afternoon.

Machado drew a one-out walk in the 10th from right-handed reliever Jesus Tinoco. Left-hander Sam Howard came on and walked the only hitter he faced, Eric Hosmer. Myers then greeted right-hander Yency Almonte, the eighth Colorado pitcher, with a line-drive RBI single to centre.

Tinoco (0-2) took the loss. Craig Stammen (8-7), the fifth pitcher deployed by the Padres, struck out two in the top of the 10th inning. It was just the third win in 10 extra-inning games this season for San Diego. The Padres took two out of three in the series. Colorado has now lost 11 of its last 13 games and 15 of 17.



Houston Astros starting pitcher Gerrit Cole delivers a pitch against the Seattle Mariners during the second inning at Minute Maid Park. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

FOCUS

Cowboys owner: QB Prescott contract 'imminent'

Reuters
New York

Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott could have a new contract before Dallas kicks off its Week 2 game at Washington.

Owner Jerry Jones said on Sunday night that a deal with Prescott is "imminent." Jones, however, wouldn't define the term with a timeframe.

"It would probably be fair to say it'll be done on an imminent basis. Imminent," Jones said. "Without being real clear, bright lined. It's not done. What's imminent? Well, days. Days. Or something like that?"

Prescott is scheduled to make

\$2.1mn in 2019, the final year of a rookie contract that paid him an average of less than \$700,000 annually.

He lit up the New York Giants in Week 1, averaging 12.7 yards per attempt with a perfect 158.3 passer rating. Prescott hit 25 of 32 passes for 405 yards and four touchdowns on Sunday. But he wants to let his play do the talking when it comes to his contract. "I have people that handle that," Prescott said.

"My focus is on this team, on the football game. I think as long as I can continue to do that, this team will do things like we did tonight. That's been all my focus for the past three months."

Prescott reported to camp as running back Ezekiel Elliott held out in

Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, and performed as the Cowboys checked off a long line of players who also represent the core of the team, Jones said. Since April, the list of those netting big dollars to stay in Dallas includes Elliott, right tackle La'el Collins, linebacker Jaylon Smith and defensive end DeMarcus Lawrence.

Offensive guard Zack Martin signed an \$84mn extension in June 2018. Prescott reportedly demanded a deal worth more than \$35mn annually, which would exceed the deal the Seattle Seahawks gave to Russell Wilson earlier this year.

Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Carson Wentz and Jared Goff of the Los Angeles Rams, the top two picks in the 2016 NFL Draft, signed four-

year extensions prior to the start of the season. They are scheduled to make around \$32mn per season.

Prescott, selected 135th in the same draft, could best those numbers.

The Atlanta Falcons fear first-round offensive lineman Chris Lindstrom fractured his foot in Sunday's season-opening loss at the Minnesota Vikings, FOX Sports' Jay Glazer reported. Lindstrom, the 14th overall pick in the 2019 draft out of Boston College, started at right guard in his NFL debut.

He will have further tests on Monday and the Falcons are "holding out hope," per the report. Lindstrom, 22, signed a four-year, \$14.7mn rookie contract that included an \$8.7mn signing bonus.



Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott.

BASKETBALL

Greece fury after Antetokounmpo exits World Cup

Reigning two-time champions US beat Brazil 89-73 to set up a quarters with France



Greece's Giannis Antetokounmpo (centre) goes for the basket as Czech Republic's Vojtech Hruban (left), Patrik Auda (second left) and Jaromir Bohacik attempt to block during the World Cup Basketball Group K second round match in Shenzhen yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Shenzhen, China

Greece are calling for the officials who oversaw their final game at the Basketball World Cup to be banned after NBA MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo and his team exited the tournament amid rancour yesterday. Greece's coach said that their star man had been the victim of a lack of "respect" from referees after being fouled out in an 84-77 victory over the Czech Republic.

The Milwaukee Bucks standout picked up a fifth foul midway through the fourth quarter and even though Greece won, it was not by the 12 or more points they needed. A team spokesman confirmed that the Greeks were writing to governing body FIBA seeking a ban for the three referees in charge.

"Also (a ban) for those who nominate the referees and also watch the video and announce the results," the spokesman said in a text message. Greece, chasing the big win they needed to reach the quarter-finals in China, were up by 10 points with just over eight minutes left.

They reached the magic 12-point lead, only for the Czechs to immediately hit

back to narrow the deficit once more, then came the loss of the 24-year-old Antetokounmpo. He was seen remonstrating with the officials after Greece's fate was sealed, but overall the reigning MVP was not on the top of his game at the World Cup.

Antetokounmpo had 12 points, nine rebounds and four assists before his afternoon — and Greece's tournament — came to an early end. "He came every day to fight on the court, of course he did not get the respect he wants and I mean about the two fouls he received today, the third and the fifth (both offensive fouls)," said Greece coach Thanasis Skourtopoulos. "You cannot call these kinds of fouls on this kind of player. That's finished because I don't like to talk about the referees too much."

It is not the first controversy involving referees at this World Cup. FIBA on Sunday removed from the competition match officials who made an error in the dying seconds of Lithuania's tournament-ending loss to France, but the result was allowed to stand. The crucial mistake occurred with the French leading 76-75 at the time. Reigning two-time champions the United States are building a head of steam and dismissed Brazil 89-73 to set

up a quarter-final with France. Yesterday's results also mean that the United States and Argentina qualified for next year's Olympic Games in Japan as the two top-ranked teams from the Americas in the 32-nation tournament in China.

They joined Australia, who earlier booked their berth by advancing into the second group stage as Oceania's best-placed team with New Zealand dropping into the 17-32nd place playoffs. The top two teams from Europe will also qualify as well as one each from Africa and Asia.

Gregg Popovich's young team were already assured of a place in the last eight in China but they still made it five wins in a row to top Group K. Tomorrow's clash with France, beaten 100-98 by Australia, will be a tougher proposition.

But having struggled to defeat Turkey in overtime in the first round, this Team USA missing its megastars seems to be warming to the task of taking home three World Cup crowns in a row. "We picked it up defensively in the second half and that's what changed it for us," said Popovich. Myles Turner of the Indiana Pacers led the US with 16 points and eight rebounds. Brazil saw their coach Aco Petrovic ejected in the first half and they refused to attend the post-match press

conference. In a thrilling encounter between two already qualified teams, Australia made it five wins out of five by battling past France. Australia will be strong favourites when they play the Czech Republic in the quarters.

Australia, who reached the 2016 Olympics last four, appear set to at least emulate the achievement after they garnished another impressive performance. The lead changed hands throughout with both teams trigger-happy from three-point range before Matthew Dellavedova and Mitch Creek sank a free throw each in the final few seconds to seal Australia's win as France threw away their last possession.

San Antonio Spurs playmaker Patty Mills shone with 30 points for Australia, Joe Ingles added 23 and Aaron Baynes chipped in with 21 as the Boomers' iron-clad backbone carried them again.

Orlando Magic guard Evan Fournier nailed a game-high 31 points for France and Nando De Colo added 26 but the French will rue spilling a 70-61 lead in the third quarter when they appeared to be in the driving seat.

In other two quarter-finals today Serbia take on Argentina and Spain will start as strong favourites against Poland.

FOCUS

Age-defying Scola propels Argentina towards WC glory

AFP
Shanghai

Luis Scola is 39, his hair has more than a few streaks of grey and at the Basketball World Cup in China he has shared the court with rivals half his age.

But Argentina's evergreen captain is playing a big part in the country's bid to win the world crown for the first time since the inaugural edition in 1950.

He was named player of the game in Sunday's 91-65 victory over Poland, drilling 21 points to propel Argentina into a quarter-final showdown with title-contenders Serbia today. The forward was also named best player against Nigeria for registering a double-double, scoring 23 points and 10 rebounds.

The last member of Argentina's so-called "Golden Generation" who won the Olympics in 2004, Scola has won every major trophy in international basketball, except the World Cup. "What age are you talking about, I'm 28, right?" he joked after Argentina swatted aside Venezuela in the second round.

Speaking in an unmistakably American accent, a product of spending a decade in the NBA up until 2017, Scola added: "I understand everybody talking about my age, but my brain does not function that way. I am not going to the court and thinking, oh my god, I'm older than these guys, or, oh my god, these guys are five, 10, 15 years younger than me. To me, it's natural. I just think that I'm a player, I am a good player

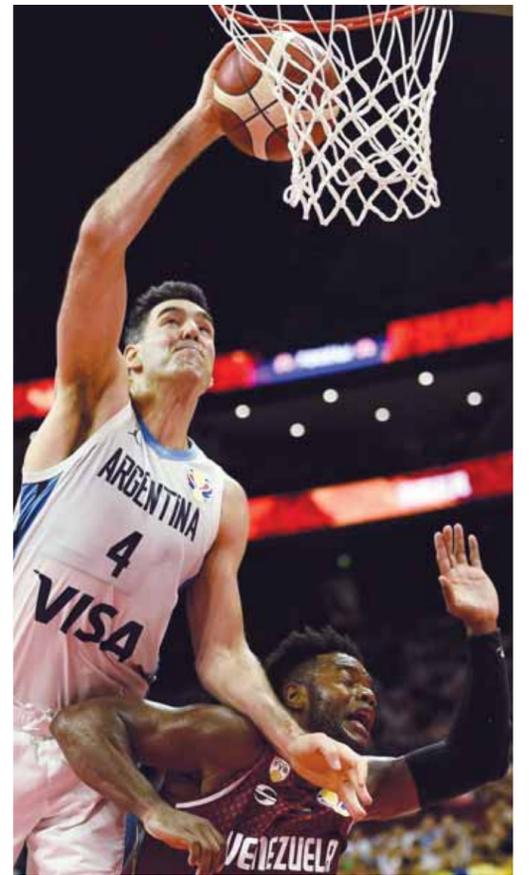
and I'm going to make good plays and help my team win."

However much he tries to avoid it, talk about his age and how much longer he can plod on for is never far away. Scola, who spent the last two seasons in Chinese basketball, is featuring in a record-equalling fifth World Cup. Last week he reached another milestone when his heroics against Nigeria moved him up to second on the FIBA World Cup all-time scoring list, trailing only the legendary Brazilian Oscar Schmidt. If that was a proud moment, there is the growing prospect that Argentina could be in for a shout of at least a medal, although Serbia will present a mighty challenge despite losing to Spain on Sunday.

That same day, Scola shared the court with the youngest player in the tournament, Poland's 18-year-old Aleksander "Olek" Balcerowski. Scola had said that what happens at the World Cup will dictate if he would carry on for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Doing so would have a nice symmetry because he is the only remaining member of the Argentina team that stunned the USA on the way to Olympic gold at Athens 2004. He was also in the team which won silver at the 2002 World Cup.

Asked what it was like to now be the grandfather of a team whose average age is 27, younger than most other rosters at the World Cup, Scola replied: "This is not like a tour or a goodbye week. This is a world championship and we are trying to go all the way to the medals. We don't do maths with the ages."



Argentina's Luis Scola (left) goes to the basket as Venezuela's Nestor Colmenares reacts during the Basketball World Cup Group I second round game in Foshan, China. (AFP)

CYCLING

Roglic tightens Vuelta grip, Fuglsang triumphs in stage 16

Reuters
Barcelona

Primoz Roglic tightened his grip on the Vuelta a Espana, while Jakob Fuglsang earned a solo triumph in stage 16 yesterday. Jumbo-Visma rider Roglic extended his lead in the overall standings to two minutes 48 seconds after his closest rival, Spain's Alejandro Valverde, lost 23 seconds on the Slovenian in the spectacular Asturian mountains.

Astana rider Fuglsang finished in four hours, one minute, 22 seconds for his first Grand Tour stage win. The Danish rider's chances in the Tour de France were ruined by two crashes with Astana saying he was in the form of his career. Fuglsang emerged from the 21-rider breakaway to leave his opponents behind and claim a lone triumph.

British Team Ineos cyclist Tao Geoghegan Hart came in second, 22 sec-



Team Astana rider Denmark's Jakob Diemer Fuglsang celebrates after winning the 16th stage of the 2019 La Vuelta cycling Tour of Spain, a 144.4km race from Pravia to the Alto de la Cubilla in Lena yesterday. (AFP)

onds behind Fuglsang, after finishing third in Stage 15 on Sunday.

Another Astana rider, Luis Leon Sanchez, took third ahead of Deceun-

ink-QuickStep Briton James Knox. "It feels great," said Fuglsang. "It was one of my goals to come here but it's one thing to have a goal and another to fulfil

it. I'm super happy to have this win."

Riders attacked from the start in a constant battle for the break at the start of the 144.4km route between Pravia and Alto de la Cubilla. Roglic and his rivals were several minutes behind the breakaway group, with the Slovenian reacting to several attacks from Miguel Angel Lopez and Tadej Pogacar.

Movistar rider Valverde struggled and Pogacar gained on him, with the Slovenian now 54 seconds behind in the Spaniard in the general classification. Stage 17 takes place on Wednesday after a rest day, with the 219.6km between Aranda del Duero and Guadalajara the longest stage of the Vuelta.

VUELTA A ESPANA 16TH STAGE RESULTS

1. Jakob Fuglsang (DEN/AST) 4hr 01min 22sec, 2. Tao Geoghegan Hart (GBR/INEOS) at 22sec, 3. Luis Leon Sanchez (ESP/AST) 40, 4. James Knox (GBR/

DEC) 42, 5. Gianluca Brambilla (ITA/TRE) 1:12, 6. Thomas De Gendt (BEL/LOT) 2:09, 7. Mikel Bizkarra (ESP/EUS) 2:15, 8. Amanuel Ghebreigzabhier (ERI/DIM) 2:21, 9. Philippe Gilbert (BEL/DEC) 2:32, 10. Geoffrey Bouchard (FRA/AG2R) same time.

General Classification: 1. Primoz Roglic (SLO/JUM) 62hrs 17min 52sec, 2. Alejandro Valverde (ESP/MOV) at 2min 48 sec, 3. Tadej Pogacar (SLO/UAE) 3:42, 4. Miguel Angel Lopez (COL/AST) 3:59, 5. Rafal Majka (POL/BOR) 7:40, 6. Nairo Quintana (COL/MOV) 7:43, 7. Nicolas Edet (FRA/COF) 10:27, 8. Wilco Kelderman (NED/SUN) 10:34, 9. Carl Fredrik Hagen (NOR/LOT) 10:40, 10. Hermann Pernsteiner (AUT/BAH) 12:05

GROENEWEGEN WINS TOUR OF BRITAIN'S THIRD STAGE

Dylan Groenewegen turned on the power in an uphill sprint finish to clinch

victory in the Tour of Britain's third stage between Berwick and Newcastle yesterday.

The Dutch Jumbo-Visma rider crossed the line comfortably ahead of compatriot Mathieu van der Poel of Corendon-Circus, Davide Cimolai, an Italian with Israeli cycling academy, and Jumbo-Visma leadout man Mike Teunissen, following the 500-metre uphill drag.

Groenewegen also took the first stage between Glasgow and Kirkcudbright.

Matteo Trentin, an Italian with Mitchelton Scott placed fifth to retain the overall leader's green jersey. Cimolai is seven seconds behind, with Van Der Poel third, 11 seconds off the front.

Team Ineos' Ben Swift is the leading British rider in seventh place, 17 seconds down on the leader.

Today's fourth stage runs from Gateshead to finish at Beast Banks in Kendal and will feature nearly 3,000 metres of climbing.

ANOC WORLD BEACH GAMES QATAR 2019

Katara to witness soccer action as teams dribble on the beach

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Out of the 14 sports that will be featuring at the inaugural edition of the ANOC World Beach Games Qatar 2019 from October 12 to 16, soccer, the king of sports, promises to be one of the major attractions at the Katara Beach in Doha.

In all, a total of 24 male and female teams, will be competing for fame and glory at the Games. The men's event will witness the participation of 192 athletes from 16 nations while 80 players from eight nations will be involved in the women's event.

At the draw ceremony held on August 27, four men's groups were drawn with Brazil, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates and Morocco in Group A while Italy,

Spain, Mexico and Solomon Islands make up Group B. Iran, Paraguay, Senegal and Ukraine are in Group C and Russia, Japan, Uruguay and El Salvador will play in Group D. In the women's event, Spain, Brazil, Cape Verde and Mexico contest Group A, while Britain, Russia, the US and Paraguay are in Group B.

According to the regulations of the tournament, the top two teams from each group will go into the quarter-finals in the men's event while the top two from each group goes into semis for women. They then compete for medals according to the system of the playoffs.

Historically, the first official beach soccer tournament was created in Rio de Janeiro in 1950 to unite neighbourhood small tournaments that has been played since 1940.

The surge in popularity,



brought about through the participation of famous players including Eric Cantona, legendary Spanish strikers Michel and Julio Salinas and Brazilian stars such as Romário, Júnior and Zico, has helped to expand television cov-

erage to large audiences in over 170 countries worldwide since its inauguration.

FIFA became the global governing body of the sport in 2005 and the first FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup was held in the same

year at the Copacabana Beach, its 'spiritual home' in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil with France defeating Portugal 1-0 in a penalty shootout, following a 3-3 draw after extra-time, to emerge champions.

As per the game's rule, a match is played by two teams, each consisting of not more than five players, one of whom is the goalkeeper and a match lasts a total of 36 minutes divided into three equal periods of 12 minutes, unless otherwise mutually agreed between the referee and the two teams. Unlike conventional soccer, up to a maximum of seven substitutes may be used in any match played in an official competition organised under the auspices of FIFA, the confederations or the member associations.

The field of play is divided into two halves by an imaginary halfway line marked by two red flags

located outside the pitch and the imaginary central point of this imaginary line is the exact position for the kick-off and certain free kicks. The pitch must be a minimum of 35m (37m max) in length and minimum of 26m (28m max) in width. The penalty area is the area on the pitch between the goal line and an imaginary parallel line at 9m from the goal line and marked by two yellow flags placed next to each touch line outside the pitch.

The ball is spherical and made of leather or another suitable material and has a circumference of not less than 68cm and not more than 70cm. It weighs no more than 440g and no less than 400g at the start of the match and has a pressure of between 0.4 and 0.6 atmospheres at sea level. Fouls in beach soccer are penalised with a free kick or a penalty kick like its conventional

counterpart. Free kicks are awarded for various fouls. All free kicks are direct free kicks which has to be taken by the player who was fouled, unless awarded for deliberate handling. The laws specify that all players apart from the opposing goalkeeper must clear a zone between the kicker and the goal. Because of this and the small playing area, all free kicks represent a good opportunity to score. Penalties are awarded for fouls within the penalty area.

The beach soccer event of the competition kicks off on October 11 and will last for six days with the finals played on October 16. More than 1,300 athletes from around 90 countries are expected at the ANOC World Beach Games Qatar 2019 with action split between the Katara, Aspire and Al Gharafa beach venues in Doha.

CRICKET

'We urned it' - Aussie pride restored in Ashes triumph

'With coach Justin Langer, and the planning of team staff that stretches back two years, the Australian team under Paine has gone beyond just restoring that pride'

AFP
Sydney

Australia's cricketers have restored national pride by retaining the coveted Ashes trophy following a reputation-shattering cheating scandal, according to the country's media who bragged: "We urned it."

Eighteen months ago, Australian cricket hit rock bottom when then-captain Steve Smith, his deputy David Warner and opener Cameron Bancroft were involved in a brazen attempt to alter the ball with sandpaper in a Cape Town Test.

It rattled the game, sparking a clean-out of executive ranks at Cricket Australia, long bans for the three guilty players and the resignation of then-coach Darren Lehmann.

Justin Langer was appointed to help restore faith in Australian cricket and bring cultural change to a team that was infamous for its abrasive attitude.

The team struggled to adjust, but under the leadership of "accidental captain" Tim Paine and with greats Ricky Ponting and Steve Waugh recruited as mentors, they have come out the other side.

"With coach Justin Langer, and the planning of team staff that stretches back two years, the Australian team under Paine has gone beyond just restoring that pride," said the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*.

"They have become winners in their own right, and everyone loves a winner."

The *Australian* newspaper said the team were "almost purified by their victory".

"After the sorrows and setbacks of the last 18 months, the country's cricket has something to celebrate at last," it added.

After Sunday's 185-run victory at Old Trafford to retain the Ashes urn, an emotional Paine praised the character of his players.

"I couldn't be more proud of the way our group have handled everything thrown at them," he said. "We haven't had a lot of success and not a lot of happy times. But we are beginning to get them and that is awesome."

Fox Sports screamed "We urned it" in its main headline, while broadcaster *Channel Nine* said the "ghosts of Leeds" had been buried, referring to their agonising third Test loss at Headingley.

Retaining the Ashes was built on the back of the incredible batting prowess of Smith, whose return for the series after serving his one-year ball-tampering

Smith is 'best player I've seen', says Australia captain Paine



Australia's captain Tim Paine (left) and Australia's Steve Smith celebrate their victory at Old Trafford in Manchester. (AFP)

Australia captain Tim Paine hailed Steve Smith as the best player he has ever seen after the star batsman picked up the man-of-the-match award following victory in the fourth Test against England on Sunday. The home side, set a huge second-innings target of 383 to win, were bowled out for 197, putting Australia 2-1 up in the five-Test series ahead of next week's finale at the Oval. The result means current holders

retain the Ashes regardless of the result in the final match of the series. Smith scored 211 and 82 in the game to take his tally for the series to an astonishing 671 runs at an average innings of 134.2, including three hundreds, despite missing England's one-wicket win in the third Test at Headingley with concussion. "I'm not sure I have ever played better," Smith told Sky Sports. "I have enjoyed my time in the

middle. I have come back fresh from a year out, but relaxed and chilled out. I want to be the one in the middle doing my job for the team as I don't particularly enjoy watching cricket." Paine said: "Steve is the best player I have ever seen. He showed that again in this Test match. He knows the game so well and reads it so well." Australia coach Justin Langer also hailed Smith, who tops the global Test batting rankings

after returning from a 12-month ball-tampering ban. "We've got the best fast bowler in the world (Pat Cummins) and the best Test batsman in the world," he told Sky Sports. "I thought Virat Kohli was the best batsman I've ever seen because of the way he plays in all forms, but Steve Smith... That's another level. "He's a great problem-solver. His hunger for the game, I've never seen anything like it."

ban showed how badly he had missed. The *Sydney Morning Herald* said it will always be remembered as "Smith's Ashes".

"Despite missing one-and-a-half Tests, he has made enough runs for three batsmen and more than twice as many as any other on either side," it noted, while former skipper Mark Taylor said "there's no superlatives left" to describe his exploits. Smith has scored an astonishing 671 runs at an average innings of 134.2, including three hundreds, ahead of the fifth and final Test starting later this week at the Oval.

Meanwhile Former Australia

captain Ricky Ponting said on Sunday that the tourists' "relentless" bowlers deserve as much credit for retaining the Ashes as Steve Smith. The world's top-ranked Test batsman, Smith has been in superb form this Ashes with 671 runs, including three hundreds, at an average of 134.20.

But Ponting - twice a losing Ashes series captain in England in 2005 and 2009 - insisted the bowlers' efforts should not be ignored. "I think they (Australia) should have had a bigger lead, not just on the back of Steve Smith," Ponting, one of the best batsmen

of his generation, told *Sky Sports*. "Everyone is talking about what impact he has had, but the whole bowling department has been absolutely outstanding. Look at the difference in the bowling attacks in this game.

"(Mitchell) Starc, (Pat) Cummins, (Josh) Hazlewood and (Nathan) Lyon, match that up with the England attack. There were more holes in that England attack than the Australia one.

"They were relentless in everything they did." Meanwhile, ex-England skipper Nasser Hussain said Australia deserved to keep the Ashes.

That England took the game into the final hour of Sunday's last day before being dismissed for 197, having been none for two after Cummins took two wickets in two balls, said much about their resolve. But Hussain, the last England captain to fail to win an Ashes series on home soil in 2001, said the hosts could have no complaints given they had lost the opener by 251 runs and then only drawn level thanks to Ben Stokes's stunning century that secured a one-wicket win in the third Test at Headingley.

"There has been progress," said Hussain.

COMMENT

Shastri focused on building Team India's bench

IAN S
New Delhi

India coach Ravi Shastri said that building bench strength so as to handle the upcoming transition phase will be key in his second term at the helm of affairs.

With the T20 World Cup coming up and the ongoing World Test Championship, captain Virat Kohli has spoken of the importance of managing the players, especially the pacers, and their workload which means more good options will be needed that can fill spots in the absence of the first choice players.

"The vision is to keep the consistency level going," Shastri said.

"It will be a team in transition and one has to keep an eye out for the youth and also keep an eye on developing the bench strength as far as batting and bowling goes across all three formats. We should, at the same time, be never losing sight of the fact that you play to win. Never losing that angle but yet at the same time, investing in youth.

"You might get the odd game or the odd series in which you might lose in the quest of investing but that is what you have to do to earn success. If you have to build a good side and keep it in good

space for another five years to go, you need to do it."

The former Indian captain said that getting youngsters ready for the 2020 World T20 and the run in the World Test Championship will be key.

"The path should be that knowing well you have got 12 months to go for the T20 World Cup and you have about 18-20 months to go for the World Test Championship," said Shastri.

"Getting youth in during that transition period by keeping an eye on the youth is important so that they can mix with the experience and give us a really solid side."

Shastri also said that the upcoming Test series against South Africa - India's second in the World Test Championship - will be a battle for pride. "We are playing at home (against South Africa) and it is the World Test Championship - so now there is even more reason on why you have to play the way you should," he said.

"There are now points to be accumulated. We are the No.1 team in the world and we have been for the last three years, so there is pride at stake as well. So, we want to keep that consistency going and ensuring that we are placed nicely in the table for when the time comes for them to decide who plays in the final."

SPOTLIGHT

Muzumdar named South Africa batting coach for India Tests

IAN S
Johannesburg

Cricket South Africa (CSA) yesterday appointed Amol Muzumdar as the interim batting coach for the upcoming three-Test series against India starting October 2.

Muzumdar had an outstanding first-class career that lasted 20 years in which he amassed over 11,000 runs, including 30 centuries.

He also holds a high performance coaching certificate from the BCCI, Cricket Australia as well as the UK through Lancashire and Yorkshire.

His previous coaching appointment included being the batting coach of Rajasthan Royals in the Indian Premier League (IPL), coaching the India U-19 and U-23 sides at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) and being the batting coach of the Netherlands.

"Cricket has always been and will continue to be my calling," said Muzumdar in an official CSA statement.

"Having spent 25 years on the pitch as a player, I intend to spend the next 25 tapping and grooming talent on the cricket field. I am very excited about this new chapter in my

coaching career," he added. "Amol is a perfect fit for us," said CSA Acting Director of Cricket Corrie van Zyl.

"He brings an intimate knowledge of Indian playing conditions and the challenges our batsmen are likely to face. He also assisted us at the spin bowling camp we held recently in India and thus has already built up a good working relationship with Aiden Markram, Temba Bavuma and Zubayr Hamza," he added.

Before the three-Test series, which will kick start South Africa's campaign in the ICC World Test Championship, the Proteas will play three T20Is against India on September 15, 18 and 22.



FOCUS

England to assess Stokes's bowling fitness

AFP
London

England will assess star all-rounder **Ben Stokes'** fitness to bowl in this week's fifth Test with Australia at the Oval as they look for a consolation win after failing to regain the Ashes.

Stokes was included in an unchanged 13-man England squad announced yesterday following a 185-run defeat in the fourth Test on Sunday that ensured Australia would keep hold of the Ashes at 2-1 up with one to play in the five-Test series.

Given the tight turnaround to a Test starting on Thursday, the lack of any changes is not altogether surprising.

It may well be, however, that national selector Ed Smith and his panel do make alterations for the upcoming tour of New Zealand, with promising batsmen Dominic Sibley and Zak Crawley among those pushing for places.



Durham paceman Stokes, England's vice-captain, did not bowl in Australia's second innings at Old Trafford following a right shoulder injury sustained during his 11th over in the tourists' first innings.

If Stokes is unfit to bowl at the Oval in south London, he is expected to play as a specialist batsman. Stokes has been a shining light amid an often fal-

terable England batting line-up this series, scoring 115 not out in the drawn second Test at Lord's before his stunning unbeaten 135 secured a dramatic one-wicket win in the third Test at Headingley.

England, if Stokes was selected purely as a batsman, would bring in a bowling all-rounder from within the squad in either Sam Curran, who would be play-

ing on his Surrey home ground, or Chris Woakes.

Both Curran and Woakes missed out at Old Trafford.

If England coach Trevor Bayliss, in what will be his last Test before he leaves his post, and captain Joe Root bring in one of the struggling batsmen - Jason Roy, Jonny Bairstow or Jos Buttler - making way.

England have been without James Anderson, their all-time leading wicket-taker, for most of this series after the 37-year-old paceman broke down with a calf injury having bowled just four overs during Australia's 251-run win in the first Test at Edgbaston.

ENGLAND SQUAD FOR 5TH TEST:

Rory Burns, Joe Denly, Joe Root, Jason Roy, Ben Stokes, Jonny Bairstow, Jos Buttler, Craig Overton, Jofra Archer, Jack Leach, Stuart Broad, Chris Woakes, Sam Curran.

Taunts from Manchester crowd just 'white noise' for Lyon

The Manchester crowd did everything to remind Nathan Lyon of his fumbled run-out in the dying moments of England's frenetic Ashes test win at Headingley but for the Australian off-spinner it was just "white noise" after the first couple of overs.

Lyon missed an easy run-out chance to dismiss England number 11 batsman Jack Leach as the hosts completed a famous one-wicket win in the third test to level the series at 1-1.

The off-spinner was taunted during the fourth test in Manchester by the vociferous home crowd, who ironically cheered him every time he came on to bowl.

Lyon said he enjoyed the "good banter". "To be honest with you, you hear it for the first over or two then it just becomes white noise," he

told reporters on Sunday after Australia retained the Ashes by beating England at Old Trafford to take a 2-1 lead in the series.

"When you're a professional sportsman, your job is to come out and bowl well, and compete against whoever you're playing. I didn't really feel it or hear it at the back end (of the match), so it doesn't worry me.

"We're sitting up there and we're going to have a couple of beers tonight and celebrate because the urn is coming home. I'm not sure what the 9,000 people in that stand are doing tonight." Lyon had Headingley hero Ben Stokes plumb lbw after the missed run-out chance but Australia had used up their reviews to challenge the umpire's not out verdict.

The 31-year-old laid on the ground as England completed

their win and appeared inconsolable before captain Tim Paine literally picked him up off the turf.

Lyon said he was devastated. "I wear my heart on my sleeve, and playing cricket for Australia means everything for me," said Lyon, who bowled on in Manchester despite suffering an injury to his bowling hand during England's first innings.

"It's not about personal success, but I've had some family issues over the past - my uncle's quite sick - so you realise quite quickly it's just a game. It does impact a lot of people, but mistakes happen.

"I didn't mean to drop the run-out or anything like that, but I had him plumb (lbw) next ball. That's just the game of cricket, you've got to pick yourself up and it's just the way you bounce back."

ONE-OFF TEST

Afghanistan equal Australia record with thrashing of Bangladesh

'They deserve this victory. After playing for 20 years, we can't say it's a build-up process'



Afghanistan players pose with the trophy after defeating Bangladesh in the one-off Test at Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rashid Khan claimed 6-49 as Afghanistan thrashed Bangladesh by 224 runs in Chittagong yesterday, equalling Australia's longstanding record as the quickest nation to chalk up two victories in Test cricket.

The Afghans defied rain and fading light to take the one-off Test, a historic win for the war-torn country that only earned full member status of the International Cricket Council in 2017.

Rashid grabbed three of the remaining four wickets as Afghanistan took 17.2 overs on the fifth day to bowl out Bangladesh for 173 in the second innings after the hosts resumed with 136-6.

Soumya Sarkar was the last man dismissed when he flicked man of the match Rashid to Ibrahim Zadran at short leg with 20 balls left in the game.

"We won this game against a side like Bangladesh," said Rashid, who made his debut as the youngest-ever Test captain

SCORECARD			
AFGHANISTAN 1st innings	342	M. Hasan lbw b Rashid	12
BANGLADESH 1st innings	205	T. Islam lbw b Rashid	0
AFGHANISTAN 2nd innings	260	N. Hasan not out	1
BANGLADESH 2nd innings (136-6 overnight)		Extras (b4, lb2) 6	
L. Das lbw b Zahir	9	Total (all out; 61.4 overs) 173	
S. Islam lbw b Nabi	41	Fall of wickets: 1-30 (Liton), 2-52 (Mosaddek), 3-78 (Mushfiqur), 4-82 (Mominul), 5-106 (Shadman), 6-125 (Mahmudullah), 7-143 (Shakib), 8-166 (Mehidy), 9-166 (Taijul), 10-173 (Soumya)	
M. Hossain c Asghar b Zahir	12	Bowlers: Yamin 4-1-14-0, Nabi 20-5-39-1, Rashid 21.4-6-49-6, Zahir 15-0-59-3.	
M. Rahim lbw b Rashid	23	Result: Afghanistan won by 224 runs.	
M. Haque lbw b Rashid	3		
S. Al Hasan c Zazai b Zahir	44		
M. c Zadran b Rashid	7		
S. Sarkar c Zadran b Rashid	15		

and finished with 11 wickets. "We are new to this format, so credit goes to the coaching staff for their support. Everyone applied themselves and stuck to their plans."

Cricket has become the national sport of war-torn Afghanistan, with

many of the Afghan players cutting their cricketing teeth in refugee camps in Pakistan.

The squad played their first Test last year, losing to cricketing giants India but claimed their first-ever victory in Test cricket in March when they beat

fellow newcomers Ireland. Bangladesh skipper Shakib was full of praise for Rashid's side.

"They deserve this victory. After playing for 20 years, we can't say it's a build-up process," he said.

"It's been a while since we played our last Test match, but Afghanistan kept the pressure on us, credit goes to their hard work."

SPORTING FAIRY TALE

Afghanistan have become a growing force in the sport in recent years, gaining one-day international status in 2009 and reaching two 50-over World Cups including the recent tournament in England.

They have also been part of four Twenty20 World Cups.

Play in Bangladesh's port city of Chittagong started on the fifth day at 1:00pm local time after rain wiped out the first session.

But rain returned in abundance after the visitors bowled just 2.1 overs without being able to inflict any damage on the home side.

Play resumed again at 4:20pm and Afghanistan were given 18.3 overs to bowl out Bangladesh, which was chasing a target of 398 runs.

Left-arm chinaman Zahir Khan dismissed overnight batsman Shakib Al Hasan in the first ball after the resumption, dealing a serious blow to the home side.

Afsar Zazai took a sharp catch behind the stump to remove Shakib for 44 and then Rashid did the rest.

Rashid trapped Mehidy Hasan dead in front for 12 and dismissed Taijul Islam in the next over for a duck to leave the last wicket pair of Soumya Sarkar and Nayeem Hasan to survive 7.3 overs.

Afghanistan made 342 runs in the first innings, owing to 102 runs of Rahmat Shah, the first-ever Test century for the country, before they bowled out Bangladesh for 205 runs to gain a massive 137-run lead.

Afghanistan rode on teenage debutant Ibrahim Zadran's 87 to score 260 runs in the second innings, setting a daunting target of nearly 400 runs for Bangladesh.

SECURITY ISSUE

10 Sri Lankan players opt out of Pakistan tour

AFP
Colombo

Ten Sri Lankan players, including T20 skipper Lasith Malinga and former captains Angelo Mathews and Thisara Perera, have pulled out of an upcoming tour of Pakistan citing security concerns, officials said yesterday.

Following a militant attack on the Sri Lankan team bus during a Test match in Lahore in March 2009, a majority of international teams have refused to tour the South Asian country.

The Sri Lanka Cricket board said in a statement that players in a preliminary squad were briefed on security arrangements for the six-match limited over series, and given the freedom to decide if they wanted to travel.

Following the briefing, ten players "chose to stay away" from the series of three One-Day Internationals and three T20 games, scheduled to begin on September 27 in Karachi, it said.

The other seven who opted out were Niroshan Dickwella, Kusal Perera, Dhananjaya de Silva, Akila Dananjaya, Suranga Lakmal, Dinesh Chandimal and Dimuth Karunaratne.

The tour was seen as another step towards reviving international cricket in Pakistan after years of isolation.

Batsman Danushka Gunathilaka said he believed security would be adequate.

"From what they told us, I think there will be very tight security," Gunathilaka said.

The Sri Lankans returned to Pakistan for a Twenty20 international in Lahore in October 2017 when Perera led the team. This time, he has decided to stay away.

Sri Lanka are also to play two Test matches against Pakistan, but the dates and the venue are yet to be announced.

Sri Lanka's Sports Minister Harin Fernando has rejected playing the longer versions of the game in Pakistan and suggested the Tests be played in the United Arab Emirates, where Pakistan have played many of their home series.



Sri Lanka Twenty20 skipper Lasith Malinga.