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GULF TIMES SPORT

CRICKET
'Accidental' skipper Paine on verge of Ashes landmark
Page 4

FOOTBALL

Goalie Sandhu the hero as India hold Qatar goalless

Afghanistan shock Bangladesh in another Group E match in Dushanbe



India goalkeeper Gurpreet Sandhu reacts after leading his team to a draw yesterday.

AFC
Doha

India displayed some resilient defending and goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu impressed as India held reigning Asian champions Qatar to a 0-0 draw at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Group E of the Asian Qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023 yesterday.

The result leaves Qatar – who defeated Afghanistan 6-0 on Matchday 1 – top of the group with four points, while India collect their first point, having lost 2-1 to Oman in the opening match.

In the absence of Akram Afif, Hassan al-Haydos was moved to fill his role on the left and the Qatar captain was the biggest threat to India early on. The Al Sadd player tested Sandhu with two efforts in the first 10 minutes, and the Indian goalkeeper made the save at his near post on both occasions.

Boualem Khoukhi had a golden chance to break the deadlock in the 26th minute when he found himself in plenty of space at the far post to receive Abdulaziz Hatem's cross from the corner, but the midfielder failed to guide his header goalward.

Having scored in Qatar's 6-0 win over Afghanistan on the opening matchday, 2018 AFC Player of the Year Abdulkarim Hassan tried his luck from long range in the last minute of the first half. His strike looked destined for the top corner, but Sandhu showed his quality and tipped it behind for a corner, keeping the match goalless at the break.

Play continued to flow in the same direction, with the 2019 AFC Asian Cup winners taking the game to their opponents. Bassam al-Rawi could not direct



India coach Igor Stimac reacts during the match.

from the left wing that was tipped away by the Indian goalkeeper, but only as far as Ali whose shot on the rebound cannoned off the crossbar.

Qatar coach Felix Sanchez rued the missed chances.

"Today we played a tough game. It wasn't our day, we weren't accurate enough to finish our chances. We are disappointed with the draw and not the effort. We have players with great quality but the Indian goalkeeper didn't let us get the points. This is a long journey and we will definitely keep playing and training to qualify," Sanchez said.

India coach Igor Stimac was happy with a point.

"I feel great! But as a coach, I don't have time to celebrate just like when we lost a few days ago, I didn't have time to think about it. I'm happy to get one point against the Asian champions and these are the points that prove to be important," said Stimac.

"Congratulations to both teams because I think the crowd enjoyed the game. Qatar maybe deserved more from the match due to the chances they created but we did have a few of our own and with experience we can do better. All credit to my players and I'm really proud of them. However, I'll like to tell them to be calm as we have more game to come," India coach Igor Stimac said.

Meanwhile in Dushanbe, Farshad Noor's first half strike proved to be enough for Afghanistan to claim a 1-0 win over Bangladesh in Group E.

The win was a perfect response from an Afghanistan side that had lost 6-0 to Qatar on matchday One.

Anoush Dastgir's side kept Bangladesh pressed in defence and took the lead in the 27th minute with Omid Popalzay sending a cross into the box which Noor headed home to break the deadlock.



India's Brandon Fernandes and Qatar's Bassam al-Rawi in action yesterday. PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil and agencies.

his header from Abdulaziz Hatem's corner in the 54th minute, and al-Haydos rifled from an angled free-kick, but Sandhu was again alert to the threat and parried it away minutes later.

India had a rare opening in the 66th minute as a swift counter attack resulted

SPOTLIGHT

Elkeson double on debut as China rout Maldives

AFP
Doha

Brazil-born striker Elkeson struck twice on his debut to give China a crushing 5-0 win over Maldives in a World Cup qualifier in Male yesterday.

Chinese football authorities included the 30-year-old in the national side last month in a bid to improve their chances of qualifying for the 2022 tournament in Qatar and Elkeson lived up to expectations by netting two penalties late in the Group A match at the Rasmee Dhandu Stadium.

Despite its clout as a global sporting and financial power China have qualified for the World Cup only once, leading to a change in policy that now allows naturalised foreign-born players to play for the national team.

"We want to go to Qatar (2022 World Cup)," Chen Xuyuan, new president of the Chinese Football Association (CFA), was quoted as saying by state media last month.

"Naturalised players can be helpful in order to achieve the national team's short-term goals.

"Up to now, clubs have registered nine naturalised players with or without Chinese heritage at the CFA in total, some of them are still going through the naturalisation process."

China dominated the game and were 2-0 up at half-time with Wu Xi and Wu Lei finding the net in the 34th and 45th minute, respectively.

They then won three straight penalties, with Yang Xu first scoring from the spot in the 65th minute before Elkeson made his mark with seven minutes remaining and claimed his double in stoppage time to complete the rout.

Earlier, Hong Kong fans booed their own national anthem and sang in protest against Beijing's rule as months of political unrest spilled onto the football pitch in a 2-0 defeat to Iran.

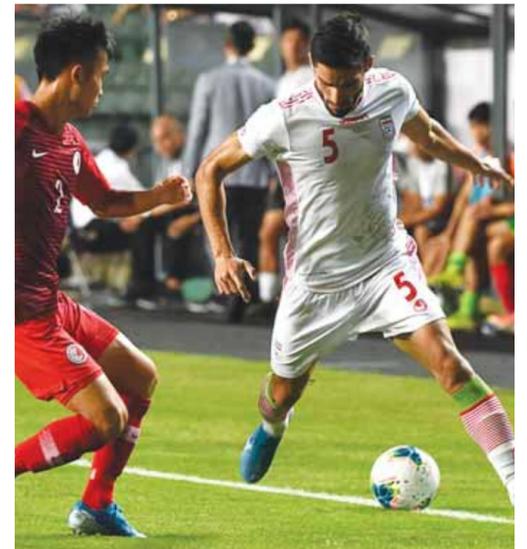
The ear-splitting dissonance all but drowned out "March of the Volunteers", the anthem the semi-autonomous territory shares with mainland China, at what was Hong Kong's first home game after a summer of upheaval.

Fans also sang a newly composed protest song, "Glory to Hong Kong", repeatedly chanted "Liberate Hong Kong" and waved a black version of the territory's Bauhinia flag, a symbol of the protests that have gripped the city for 14 weeks.

In Riffa, Bahrain, war-torn Yemen came agonisingly close to upsetting their much powerful neighbour Saudi Arabia, eventually settling for a credible 2-2 draw. Mohsen Mohamed put Yemen ahead in the eighth minute, but Saudi Arabia hit back through Hattan Bahebri in the 23rd to restore parity.

An Omar al-Dahi strike in the 37th minute gave Yemen the lead once again but they were unable to build on it as the Saudis equalised through Salem al-Dawsari three minutes into the second half to clinch a draw.

Elsewhere, Australia thrashed Kuwait 3-0 with Mathew Leckie scoring twice, South Korea beat Turkmenistan 2-0, Thailand smashed Indonesia 3-0 and the UAE edged past Malaysia 2-1.



Iran's Milad Mohammadi (R) fights for the ball with Hong Kong's Tsui Wang Kit during the second round Group C qualification match at the Hong Kong Stadium in Hong Kong yesterday.

SPOTLIGHT

Belgium, Netherlands hit four as Germany edge closer to Euros

Belgium captain De Bruyne made three assists before scoring himself with eight minutes remaining



Belgium's midfielder Kevin De Bruyne (second left) scores against Scotland during the Euro 2020 football qualification match at Hampden Park in Glasgow on Monday night. (AFP)

AFP
Paris

Belgium and the Netherlands both cruised to 4-0 wins over Scotland and Estonia respectively in Euro 2020 qualifying on Monday night, while Germany claimed a crucial victory over Northern Ireland in their bid to qualify for next year's finals.

Roberto Martinez's Belgium, the world-number-one ranked side, were not at their best but still swatted aside a poor Scotland outfit at Hampden Park to make it six wins from as many matches in Group I. Inter Milan striker Romelu Lukaku gave the visitors the lead in Glasgow in only the ninth minute with his Belgian record-extending 49th international goal. Defenders Thomas Vermaelen and Toby Alderweireld ended the game as a contest with less than 32 minutes on the clock.

Manchester City midfielder Kevin De Bruyne, who had assisted each of the first three goals, completed the scoring

himself with eight minutes remaining. "It was not a world-class performance, we just did what we had to do," said Belgium captain De Bruyne. "We had a tough start but after our first goal, we had more control and Scotland did not get many chances."

Belgium, who finished third at last year's World Cup, are now 11 points clear of third-placed Kazakhstan at the summit of their group with the top two automatically qualifying and only four games to play. "We knew that with a win we would almost certainly qualify, and that is most important," added De Bruyne. Russia remain in pole position to progress from Group I with Belgium, after Mario Fernandes' 89th-minute winner sealed a 1-0 win over Kazakhstan which moved Stanislav Cherchesov's men eight points ahead of their beaten opponents.

The Netherlands backed up their stunning 4-2 win over Germany in Hamburg last Friday by thrashing Estonia in Tallinn, as Ryan Babel scored his maiden international double. Memphis Depay, making his 50th Netherlands

appearance, grabbed the third goal, with Liverpool's Georginio Wijnaldum also finding the net.

Ronald Koeman's side still have work to do to reach a first major finals since making the 2014 World Cup semi-finals, though, as they trail second-placed Northern Ireland by three points in Group C, albeit with a game in hand.

The Euro 1988 winners next host the Northern Irish on October 10 in a crucial encounter. "I'm no longer one of the younger players in the team, so I try to compensate for the loss of speed by using my experience," the 32-year-old Babel said.

Germany lead the group standings after edging to a nervy 2-0 victory in Belfast. Marcel Halstenberg's brilliant volley broke the deadlock shortly after half-time in a tense encounter, and Serge Gnabry gave Joachim Loew's men breathing space in injury-time. "After the defeat against Holland, we were under pressure today and had to overcome some difficulties," said Germany boss Loew.

Earlier, Croatia suffered a setback

in their qualifying campaign as they were held to a 1-1 draw by Azerbaijan in Baku. The 2018 World Cup runners-up took an early lead through a Luka Modric penalty, but the hosts hit back with Tamkin Khalilzade's brilliant 72nd-minute equaliser to claim their first point in Group E.

Leaders Croatia are only ahead of third-placed Hungary, who they host on October 10, by one point, with Slovakia second on head-to-head record after winning 2-1 in Budapest. Wales are three points further back, but having played a game fewer.

"It wasn't a good match for us, especially the second half when we didn't take any chances," coach Zlatko Dalic said. Azerbaijan, coached by Croatian Nikola Jurcovic, remain rooted to the foot of the table.

Elsewhere, North Macedonia kept their hopes of reaching a maiden major tournament alive with a 2-0 win in Latvia. The Balkan nation sit fourth in Group G, but are only three points behind second-placed Slovenia after their dramatic 3-2 win over Israel, with Aus-

tria two points better off in third following a goalless stalemate at leaders Poland.

EURO 2020 QUALIFYING RESULTS

Group C: At Belfast: Northern Ireland 0 Germany 2 (Halstenberg 48, Gnabry 90+3); At Tallinn: Estonia 0 Netherlands 4 (Babel 17, 48, Depay 76, Wijnaldum 87)

Group E: At Baku: Azerbaijan 1 (Khalilzade 72) Croatia 1 (Modric 11-pen); At Budapest: Hungary 1 (Szoboszlai 50) Slovakia 2 (Mak 40, Bozenik 56)

Group G: At Ljubljana: Slovenia 3 (Verbic 43, 90, Bejak 66) Israel 2 (Natcho 50, Zahavi 63); At Warsaw: Poland 0 Austria 0; At Riga: Latvia 0 North Macedonia 2 (Pandev 14, Bardi 17)

Group I: At Glasgow, Scotland: Scotland 0 Belgium 4 (Lukaku 9, Vermaelen 24, Alderweireld 32, De Bruyne 82); At Seravalle, San Marino: San Marino 0 Cyprus 4 (Kousoulos 2, 73, Papoulis 39, Artyamas 75); At Kaliningrad, Russia: Russia 1 (Fernandes 89) Kazakhstan 0

Cowley brothers target 'football miracle' at Huddersfield

London: Danny Cowley has set his sights on the Premier League after making Huddersfield the next step in his "fairytale" managerial career.

Cowley, along with his assistant manager and brother Nicky, left League One Lincoln to take charge of the Championship strugglers on Monday. Together the pair, both former PE teachers, have enjoyed a remarkable rise up the football ladder, first managing in non-League with Concord Rangers and then Braintree Town. Their success in then taking Lincoln up two divisions from the National League attracted interest from elsewhere, with the Terriers moving in following the departure of Jan Siewert last month.

Unveiled alongside his brother at a press conference yesterday, Danny Cowley said: "The short-term objectives are to find a way to play winning football and retain our status in this division. It will then be about building a competitive team in the Championship and from there we'll have the foundations to push on. You have to dream big."

"For Nicky and I it's been a fairytale. There's no hiding place from that. We started in the Essex Senior League. You have to believe in football miracles and they have happened here once before in recent history."

Cowley was referring to Huddersfield's surprise promotion to the top flight in 2017. Under David Wagner, the club survived their first season in the Premier League but his departure last term was followed by relegation. Wagner's successor, Siewert, was unable to arrest the decline and was sacked last month after a dismal start to the current campaign.

The brothers take charge with the club 23rd in the Championship and only one point to their name. They have won one match in all competitions since 25 November last year.

"I don't think it will be easy," said Danny Cowley, who faces Sheffield Wednesday in his first game on Sunday. "If we thought this job would be easy we wouldn't have taken it. We want to be challenged. I want to live life. The safer option would have been to stay at Lincoln, a club we loved and felt a connection with, but we are not interested in easy decisions. We want to test ourselves."

"I didn't want to die wondering. I want that moment when your back's against the wall and facing adversity, that for me that is really living. That is what I am looking forward to."

Danny will have the title manager but it is clear that he and his brother come as a pair. "We are used to working together," he said. "We talk together. We have lived our lives in each others' pockets."

FOCUS

Iran to probe death of 'blue girl' football fan

AFP
Tehran

Iran is to probe the death of a woman football fan, state media said yesterday, after she reportedly set herself ablaze in fear of being jailed, triggering calls for an end to a ban on women attending matches.

Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Masoumeh Ebtekar had asked the judiciary to look into the case in a letter, the state-run Iran newspaper reported.

Sahar Khodayari, 30, was arrested early last year when she tried to enter a stadium dressed as a man to watch her favourite team, Esteghlal FC, the Vazesh 3 sports news outlet said, citing her sister.

Dubbed "blue girl" because of Esteghlal's colours, she set herself on fire outside the court last week after hearing someone there say she would be going to prison for six months, it said.

Iran has barred Iranian women spectators from football and other stadiums since 1981, with clerics arguing they must be protected from the masculine atmosphere and sight of semi-clad men. The judiciary's Mizan Online website said a young woman had been arrested when she tried to enter a stadium and faced charges of offending "public chastity and insulting" law enforcement officers.

Citing an informed judiciary official, it said no sentence had been issued since there had been no trial and the judge



Iran has barred women spectators from football and other stadiums since 1981. (AFP)

was away on leave. The reported death sparked an outcry online, where many using the hashtag #blue_girl called on world football's governing body FIFA to ban Iran from competitions.

Pictures said to be of her in hospital covered in heavy bandages have been shared widely on social media.

Iranian football legend Ali Karimi urged his 4.5m Instagram followers to boycott stadiums. "The women of our land are

better than men," he wrote alongside an image of a woman with a football for a heart and flames over her head.

FIFA said it was "aware of that tragedy and deeply regret it". "FIFA... reiterates our calls on the Iranian authorities to ensure the freedom and safety of any women engaged in this legitimate fight to end the stadium ban," it added in a statement.

Esteghlal expressed sorrow over her death. "The tragic death of our beloved

child, Ms. Sahar Khodayari, has caused much sadness and regret for Esteghlal FC," the club said. "We offer condolences to you and your relatives, ask God for mercy and forgiveness and also patience and health for your family and all soccer fans."

The judiciary's news website said Khodayari's body had been handed over to her family, who live in Qom, south of Tehran. Iran has come under pressure from FIFA to allow women to attend qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup, and was reportedly given a deadline of August 31 to comply.

The Iranian sports ministry said last month that women fans would be allowed into the stadium when Team Melli — as the national team are known — play their next home qualifier.

"Women can go to the Azadi stadium on October 10" to watch the match against Cambodia, Jamshid Taghizadeh, the sports ministry's deputy for legal and provincial affairs, was quoted as saying at the time.

The ban on women in stadiums is not written into law or regulations, but is "ruthlessly enforced", said Human Rights Watch, calling it a "clear violation of the rules in FIFA". The authorities in Iran have allowed foreign women to go to matches in the country in the past.

While a small number of Iranian women have attended select international matches on previous occasions, others have faced prosecution for entering stadiums at other times.

WORLD CUP QUALIFIER

French coach Mette keeps promise as Djibouti advance

AFP
Johannesburg

French coach Julien Mette kept a bold promise to Djibouti football officials by guiding the tiny Horn of Africa state into the second round of 2022 World Cup qualifying yesterday. The country that had won only one of 13 previous qualifiers forced a shock 0-0 away draw with eSwatini (formerly Swaziland) to win a first round tie 2-1 on aggregate.

Djibouti built the one-goal first leg advantage last week, but a team ranked 195th in the world were not expected to retain it given a woeful World Cup away record. The outcome marked a dramatic turnaround from four years ago when eSwatini trounced Djibouti 8-1 over two legs in 2018 World Cup qualifying.

Known as the 'Shoremen of the Red Sea', their previous away losses included conceding nine goals in the Democratic Republic of Congo and eight in

Malawi. Mette was hired by Djibouti recently after coaching two Congo Brazzaville clubs and told to "stop the regular five and six goals defeats and restore dignity to Djiboutian football."

"The officials did not speak to me about qualifying for the Africa Cup of Nations, the African Nations Championship or the World Cup," Mette said. "All he (the national football federation president) wanted was to stop losing 5-0 and 6-0 and I said I would definitely bring him that dignity."

Meanwhile, Gerald Phiri scored nine minutes from time to give Malawi a 1-0 victory over Botswana in Blantyre with the only goal of the two legs.

Goals from Clesio Baque and Geny Catamo earned Mozambique a 2-0 win over Mauritius in Maputo and a three-goal aggregate success. It was a satisfactory start for Mozambique-born coach Luis Goncalves, who was appointed last month after his predecessor lasted just two matches, one of which was a victory.

SPOTLIGHT

Lukaku is the latest victim of ultras' warped loyalty

Racism is deep-rooted among far-right fans, as the Inter Milan forward discovered when his own supporters defended Cagliari abuse

By Nicky Bandini
The Guardian

Romelu Lukaku has adapted quickly to life in Serie A, scoring in his first two games for Internazionale. Sadly, he received a similarly swift introduction to some of the worst elements of Italian football culture. Targeted with monkey chants during the win at Cagliari, he was then addressed with an open letter from a group of his own club's ultras insisting he ought not to interpret such abuse as racist.

"You have to understand that Italy is not like many other north European countries where racism is a REAL problem," said the statement, published on Facebook by a group who occupy the second tier of the Curva Nord at Inter's San Siro home. "In Italy we use some 'ways' only to 'help our teams' and to try to make our opponents nervous, not for racism but to mess them up."

It is true the methods are nothing new. Moise Kean was subjected to the same chants when Juventus visited Cagliari in April, just as Blaise Matuidi had been the previous year and Sulley Muntari in 2017.

Nor are they exclusive to one club. Inter were ordered to play two games behind closed doors last season after Kalidou Koulibaly was racially abused during their win over Napoli.

Nevertheless, it was striking to see the defence of Cagliari's supporters being led by ultras from the very club whose new signing had been targeted. Lukaku is a popular addition at Inter. The same Facebook group that aspired to teach him what constitutes racism had previously shared a picture of him stood with some of its members, wearing a Curva Nord T-shirt.

Solidarity between ultras, however, has often transcended club loyalties. Following the abuse of Koulibaly, Napoli distributed photographs of his face at their next home game. Thousands were held up before kick-off but the ultras behind each goal declined to

participate – standing instead to commemorate Daniele Belardinelli, a Varese fan who had died after being run over following an attack on a minibus full of Napoli's own supporters on their way to the Inter game.

This season, there have been tributes in various Italian stadiums to Fabrizio Piscitelli, widely known by his nickname, Diabolik. Piscitelli had been the leader of the Irriducibili, the group of Lazio ultras who long stood at the centre of the Stadio Olimpico's Curva Nord, before being shot dead in August.

Under Piscitelli's leadership, the Irriducibili used violence to claim superiority over rival Lazio ultras in the late 1980s and became notorious for fascist imagery and antisemitic provocations.

Even as their influence waned in recent years, the group still attracted attention by leaving stickers of Anne Frank wearing a Roma shirt on the walls of the Stadio Olimpico, and attempting to ban women from the front 10 rows of the curva.

At Inter's opening home game of this season, against Lecce, ultras staged a giant choreography in Piscitelli's honour, the words "Fabrizio with us" accompanied by two Lazio eagles spread across the second tier of San Siro's curva nord. Even Antonio Conte's first game as manager – also Lukaku's debut – marking the death of an admired rival was given precedence over their own team. Such a response may help to explain their treatment of Lukaku. In their open letter to the player, the Inter ultras sought to portray themselves as the persecuted party. "When you declare that racism is a problem to be fought in Italy," they wrote, "you just help the repression against all football fans, including us."

It is a narrative that ties together with far-right politics: the suggestion that free speech is under attack from an authoritarian establishment. Ultras are quick to highlight perceived inconsistencies as well. Footage has emerged of Cagliari supporters making similar noises to those directed at Lukaku at a white centre-forward, Brescia's Al-



Inter Milan fans have claimed in an open letter to their striker Romelu Lukaku that the monkey chants directed at him by Cagliari fans were not racist. (Reuters)

fredo Donnarumma, as he prepared to take a penalty against them.

Context matters, in cases of discrimination, and attempts to present the two cases as analogous ought to be resisted. Yet Cagliari officials have cited these events as muddying the waters in their own attempts to identify and ban those who engage in racist abuse.

Knowing how to respond to an open letter published on a social media platform is more complicated still. When Koulibaly was abused at San Siro last season, Inter reacted by launching their own anti-racism initiative, Brothers Universally United (an acronym for the noise made by the abusers, "BUU"), but so far neither they nor Lukaku have

made any comment on the ultras' letter. The player may feel he has said all he wanted on the subject with an Instagram post following the Cagliari game, in which he called on football federations and social media platforms to do more to combat discrimination. "Ladies and gentlemen, it's 2019," he wrote. "Instead of going forward we're

going backwards." Serie A intends launching a fresh anti-racism initiative next month, to include all 20 clubs with "the aim of making all supporters more aware of this delicate and important issue." Awareness, though, can hardly be the problem after a week when the story spread around the world.

ROUND-UP

De Gea close to signing new Manchester United contract

David de Gea is close to finally agreeing a new contract with Manchester United, The Guardian reported. The goalkeeper is on the verge of completing the details on terms in the region of the £290,000-a-week basic earned by Paul Pogba and the Spaniard expects to sign soon, it is understood.

De Gea is out of contract next summer so a new deal would allow United to protect an asset whose market price would rise to at least £80m. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was charged, in part, with convincing key players that their future remained at United when appointed caretaker manager last December.

Anthony Martial signed again for the long term in January and should De Gea follow this would be viewed as further success by the club hierarchy. The Spain international joined United in the summer of 2011.



David De Gea is out of contract next summer so a new deal would allow Man United to protect an asset whose market price would rise to at least £80m.

EVERTON'S MINA FINED AFTER BETTING CHARGE

Everton defender Yerry Mina has been fined £10,000 (\$12,338) after admitting a Football Association misconduct charge in relation to betting rules, English football's governing body said. In a statement, the FA said that Mina was fined for "participating in an advertisement for betting activity which he is prohibited from engaging in", a television advert for gambling company Betjuego in his home country of Colombia earlier this year.

The FA Regulatory Commission revealed all the money Mina received for the advert was donated to his charitable foundation, which was set up by the former Barcelona centre-back in 2016 to help disadvantaged young people back home.

It was also confirmed the 24-year-old requested the advert to be removed as soon as he was informed he was in breach of FA rules, while he ended his association with the betting company in May. Stringent rules are in place over sports betting in order to prevent match-fixing and spot-betting.

Earlier this year, former Liverpool

striker Daniel Sturridge, now playing for Trabzonspor, was fined £75,000 (\$94,000) and handed a six-week suspension after being found guilty of breaching different betting rules.

Meanwhile, Leeds midfielder Jordan Stevens has been given a six-week ban and a £1,200 fine after placing 59 bets on football between August 2018

and May 2019 – including five games involving his own team.

The ban is on all footballing activity which means Stevens is unable to train with Leeds during that period or interact with players or coaching staff – a move the second-tier Championship club called "excessive" and a "disproportionate punishment".

TOTTENHAM'S LO CELSO RULED OUT UNTIL LATE OCTOBER

Tottenham midfielder Giovanni Lo Celso will be sidelined until late October after injuring a hip on international duty with Argentina. Lo Celso suffered the damage during Argentina's 0-0 friendly draw against Chile in Los Angeles last week.

The 23-year-old was forced to withdraw from the Argentina squad and is back at his Premier League club for treatment. "Giovanni Lo Celso has returned early to Hotspur Way after being withdrawn from the Argentina squad due to a hip injury," said a statement on Tottenham's website.

"The attacking midfielder sustained the injury during his national team's match against Chile. He will now undergo a period of rehabilitation and is expected to return to training with the first team towards the end of October."

Lo Celso's injury is a fresh blow to Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino after his side's spluttering start to the season, which includes just one win from four league games. The highly-rated Lo Celso has made three substitute appearances since arriving from Real Betis on a season-long loan on transfer deadline day, with a view to a permanent move.

CITY ASSEMBLE FOOTBALL'S FIRST BILLION-EURO SQUAD: STUDY

Premier League champions Manchester City are the first team to have spent more than 1bn euros (\$1.1bn) to assemble their squad, a study has shown. Data from the Swiss-based CIES Football Observatory showed that City have spent 1.014bn euros on their current squad.

French champions Paris St-Germain were second having spent 913m euros and Spain's Real Madrid were third with 902m euros. Manchester United (751m euros) have the second-most expensive squad in the Premier League followed by Champions League winners Liverpool (639m euros). The Premier League average was 345m euros, it said.

At the other end of the scale, Ger-

many's Paderborn had the cheapest squad in the study (4m euros), which looked at teams from the English, German, Italian, French and Spanish top flights.

FIVE CUBAN FOOTBALLERS DEFECT IN CANADA

Five Cuban footballers defected following the team's 6-0 thrashing by Canada in the CONCACAF Nations League in Toronto, Cuban television reported. Yordan Santa Cruz, Andy Baquero, David Urgelles, Orlendiz Benitez and Alejandro Portal all left the squad in the wake of Saturday's game, a report said, describing the defections as "regrettable".

Santa Cruz is regarded as one of the best players in Cuban football and with Baquero had been part of the Cuban team that qualified for the Under-20 World Cup in 2013. The defections are the latest to hit Cuban football in recent years.

Forty-four players have defected in the past 17 years, including four who walked out on the team during the Gold Cup in the United States in June. In 2015 several Cuban players also defected during the Gold Cup, despite improving relations between Havana and the then US administration of President Barack Obama.

UEFA INVESTIGATES FRENCH FOR DELAYED ALBANIA KICK OFF

UEFA said it had opened proceedings against the French Football Federation (FFF) after their Euro 2020 qualifier was delayed when Albania refused to kick off until they had heard their national anthem.

The hosts played the Andorran anthem by mistake at ahead of the fixture at the Stade de France on Saturday. After the angry Albanians protested, the correct anthem was played and the game kicked off more than five minutes late. UEFA's Disciplinary Committee, which investigates any delay to kick off, has notified the FFF and the case will be heard on 17 October. The penalty is usually a warning for the first offence and a fine for a second occurrence.

Zhang says his youth will bring new ideas, new energy to Inter

Geneva: Inter Milan president Steven Zhang believes his youth will help bring new energy and new ideas to his club and help them understand how people of his generation watch football. Chinese businessman Zhang, 27, was appointed as president last October, promising to lead Inter, who have not won a major trophy since 2011, into a new era.

The son of Zhang Jindong, chairman of China's electronics retailer Suning Holdings Group which bought a majority stake in the club in 2016, he had been a club director for the previous two years. Zhang said he appreciated that supporters of his age watched football differently to those of older generations.

"They don't watch the game for just 90 minutes any more, they actually watch video clips, Instagrams, YouTube clubs, social media," he told reporters after being elected onto the European Club Association (ECA) board. "So, in a way, I can bring new ideas... for European football and a more global view and more technology-oriented."

Zhang also appealed to the club's fans to give time to new coach Antonio Conte. Three-times European champions Inter have won 18 Serie A titles and the Coppa Italia seven times but have struggled since winning a Champions League, Serie A and Coppa Italia treble under coach Jose Mourinho in 2010. Conte is the 13th coach since then and replaced Luciano Spalletti, who was sacked last season.



COMMENT

Root under 'no pressure' despite Ashes failure: Bayliss

AFP
London

Joe Root is under "no pressure" as England captain despite failing to wrest the Ashes from Australia's grasp, outgoing coach Trevor Bayliss said yesterday.

Australia lead the five-match series 2-1 with one Test to go, meaning they are certain to retain the urn because they are the Ashes holders. England's failure has led to questions over Root's position, particularly given his inconsistent batting throughout the series.

But Australian Bayliss, who leaves his role after four years following this week's final Test at the Oval, said there were no issues with his skipper.

"He's not come under question from anyone making any decisions," Bayliss said. "He's under no pressure at all."

Root, sixth in the world rankings, averages less than 31 in the series so far and has been dismissed for nought three times.

Speaking about Root's form with the bat, Bayliss added: "Everyone goes through periods where they don't score as many

runs as they'd like. I think the Australian team have bowled pretty well to him, so we'll see how things go further down the line.

"From my point of view, he was our premier batter and the Australians always try and target the opposition captain. He's played well when he's got starts and I don't see too many problems."

After winning at Old Trafford to go 2-1 up in the series, Australia's players celebrated on the field and were accused by some of mocking England spinner Jack Leach while doing so.

"No one has mentioned it or spoken about it. It's all talk from you guys (the media)," said Bayliss.

Bayliss will return to Australia after the series, having spent four years in the job and taking England to World Cup glory in July.

"On one hand I am sad to be leaving," he said. "It's been a fantastic environment to work in, everyone has made me feel at home."

"From a cricket sense we've had a lot of good performances, the cherry on top the World Cup win."

"But I am looking forward to getting home and it's time for

someone else to come in with a new voice."

ANDERSON BACKS ROOT

Injured England pacesman James Anderson said Root remained the best man to captain the side and would have the chance to forge a relationship with Bayliss's successor. "He has done some great work," he told the Press Association.

"But the team has been developing over the last few years and going into a big series like this you want a settled team that's fit and firing. I feel for Joe as he's not quite had that. It's been difficult."

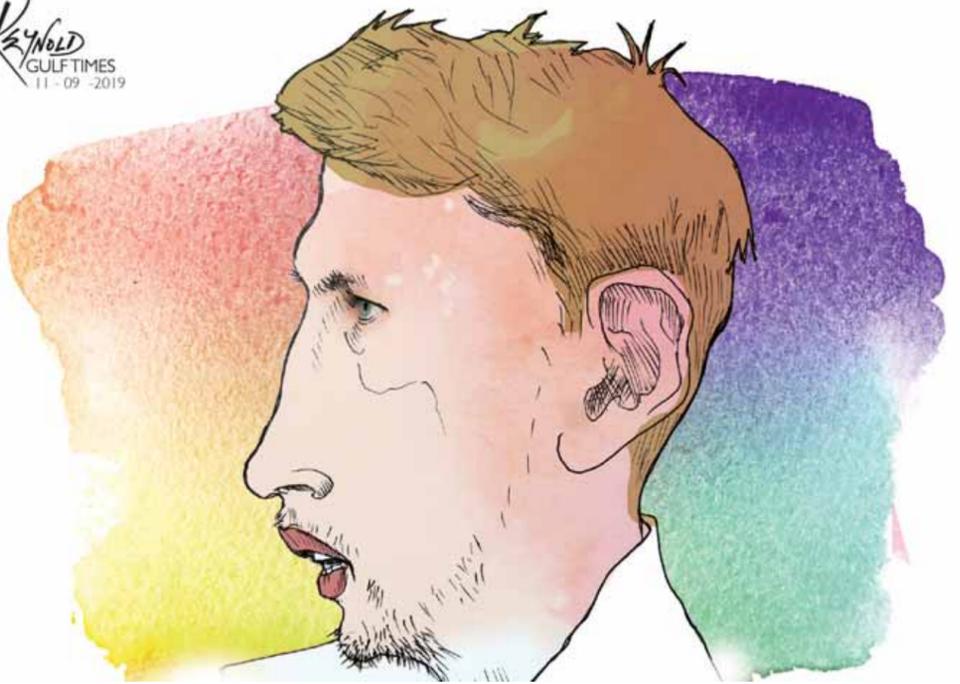
Anderson, England's all-time leading Test wicket-taker, said he had no intention of retiring despite an injury-ravaged season.

"One of the big frustrations about not playing is seeing the guys out on the field," he said.

"It's been great to see Jofra (Archer) taking to international cricket the way he has and Broady (Stuart Broad) has been fantastic all series. He's shown his class all the way through."

"I'd love to be a part of this bowling attack because I think we could have something special there."

REYNOLD
GULFTIMES
11-09-2019



FOCUS

'Accidental' captain Paine on verge of Ashes landmark

'In terms of what we've been able to achieve as a group is pretty satisfying'

AFP
London

Greg Chappell could not do it, while Ricky Ponting and Michael Clarke, who had both had two attempts each, were unable to manage it either.

But if his side avoid defeat in the fifth Test against England at The Oval starting tomorrow, Tim Paine will join the list of Australia captains who have led the team to an Ashes series win in England.

It is a feat no Australia captain has achieved since Steve Waugh oversaw a 4-1 success 18 years ago. Waugh, like Chappell, Ponting and Clarke, is one of Australia's greatest cricketers.

No one, least of all wicket-keeper Paine himself, would suggest he is in that class and the way in which he inherited the captaincy was highly unusual.

Traditionally, Australia have picked their best 11 players first and then opted for one of them as captain, while in England, where there has long been an emphasis on 'leadership qualities', the tendency has been to select the skipper first and then find 10 others to join him.

Paine's case was different. Following the ball-tampering scandal in Cape Town in March 2018 that saw Steve Smith stripped of the captaincy and David Warner removed from the post of vice-



Australia's captain Tim Paine (left) gestures beside Steve Smith as they celebrate their victory on the field after the fourth Ashes cricket Test match on Sunday. (AFP)

captain — with both batsmen subsequently given 12-month bans by Cricket Australia — officials needed someone uncontaminated by the incident to lead the team and turned to Paine the morning after 'Sandpapergate'.

Paine, who had made his Australia debut in a Test against Pakistan at Lord's in 2010, had

been on the brink of retiring from cricket in 2017 and taking up a job with an equipment manufacturer instead.

But having forced his way back into the side, the Tasmanian found himself thrust into the captaincy barely a year later.

Ever since becoming skipper, Paine has faced accusations that

he is both an "accidental" skipper and not worth his place in the side. But having shown dignity after a dramatic one-wicket loss in the third Test at Headingley, Paine had the satisfaction of leading the team to an 185-run win at Old Trafford on Sunday that ensured they retained the Ashes at 2-1 up with just one to

play. Much of the credit will go to Smith, who has so far scored 671 runs at 134.20 with three hundreds, including 211 at Old Trafford, in his first series since his ban. "He is just a genius and I never had any doubt he would come back and be the player he was," said Paine, who made his Test debut in the same match as Smith.

"The scary thing is he's getting better. I don't know where it is going to stop but we are enjoying being on the ride, that is for sure."

Just as Smith is the world's top-ranked Test batsman, Australia spearhead Pat Cummins is at the summit of the corresponding bowling rankings.

Most captains are only as good as their players, but Paine contributed to victory in Manchester by ending a run of low scores with a valuable first-innings 58.

"In terms of what we've been able to achieve as a group is pretty satisfying from where we've come from in the last 18 months," said Paine. "Also from where we've come from, even from last week (the defeat at Headingley). That was a loss that would break a lot of teams but we weren't. As for personal satisfaction, the 34-year-old Paine added: "My dream was to come here and win an Ashes. I certainly didn't want to be the captain winning the Ashes. "I am just happy to be a part of it. I could have been working at Kookaburra so this isn't bad."

SPOTLIGHT

Reluctant Bangladesh captain Shakib takes blame for Afghan loss



Shakib Al Hasan plays a shot during the fourth day of the one-off cricket Test match against Afghanistan at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong on Sunday. (AFP)

Reuters
Dhaka

Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan has taken full responsibility for their shocking home defeat to test rookies Afghanistan in the one-off match at Chattogram and says it would be best if someone else took over the captaincy.

The 32-year-old all-rounder, widely regarded as the best cricketer Bangladesh has ever produced, took the test captaincy in 2017 from Mushfiqur Rahim for his second stint at the helm after leading them between 2009 and 2011. Afghanistan, playing only their third match after being inducted as a test-playing nation two years ago, completed a famous victory by defeating Bangladesh by 224 runs with 3.2 overs left on the final day on Monday.

"It will be best if I didn't have to lead," Shakib told reporters after the match. "I personally believe it will be good for my game."

"And if I have to continue leading, then obviously there is a lot to discuss about (with the board)."

Shakib was the lone shining light for Bangladesh during the 50-overs World Cup in England, finishing third on the run-getters' list with 606 from eight innings while also picking up 11 wickets with his left-arm orthodox spin bowling.

Following the World Cup he

took a break during Bangladesh's dismal tour of Sri Lanka, where they lost all three one-day internationals but his return failed to inspire the side to victory against Rashid Khan's Afghanistan.

Heavy showers allowed little play on the final day, leaving Afghanistan with a little more than 18 overs in the final session to take the remaining four wickets and force a result, while Bangladesh had high hopes of avoiding defeat with Shakib unbeaten on 44.

However, he edged spinner Zahir Khan off the first ball of the session while attempting a cut shot to allow Afghanistan their big breakthrough.

"I am really disappointed," Shakib said. "The whole blame goes on my shoulders."

"I was very nervous when I came out to bat, and got out the first ball. So it became harder for the team. The dressing room would have felt more comfortable if I had stayed out."

"We had to play only one hour and 10 minutes, and I got out the first ball. So it became harder for the team. The dressing room would have felt more comfortable if I had stayed out."

Giving his team zero marks out of 100 for the match, Shakib said they had to produce better players if they were to become more consistent.

"If we want to play well consistently, we need to improve our quality and need more quality players."

Langer defends Australia's Ashes celebrations

Australia coach **Justin Langer** has defended his players' boisterous celebrations after retaining the Ashes following claims they mocked England spin bowler Jack Leach. Langer's side clinched a dramatic fourth Test win over England in the last hour of Sunday's final session at Old Trafford. The victory gave Australia a 2-1 lead with just one match to play and they marked the occasion with a raucous on-field party. At one stage, Australia's star batsman Steve Smith was

seen wearing and rubbing a pair of glasses before shadow batting left-handed in the middle of a team huddle. Some fans and pundits came to the conclusion that Smith was unkindly parodying the glasses-wearing Leach. Leach had helped England teammate Ben Stokes snatch a remarkable win in the third Test with a 76-run unbroken partnership, during which the spinner scored just one run. But Langer is adamant Smith was mimicking Chris Rogers, who last played for Australia in 2015 and, like

Leach, wears glasses when he bats. "Experience tells me that when you're doing well, people will try and pick holes in you," Langer told reporters yesterday. "I know the truth. Chris Rogers is a great mate of the squad, that's all it's about. People can make up what they like about it, but that's the truth." Australia can clinch their first Test series win in England since 2001 if they avoid defeat in the last match, which starts at the Oval tomorrow.



Australia head coach Justin Langer during the press conference. Reuters

NFL

Lutz's career-long field goal lifts Saints over Houston Texas

'It is crazy, that's an amazing win. That's got to be the top-one moment for me'



New Orleans Saints kicker Wil Lutz screams as he runs from the field after kicking a game-winning field goal against the Houston Texans at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

AFP
Los Angeles

Drew Brees orchestrated the winning drive and Wil Lutz capped it with a career-long 58-yard field goal as the New Orleans Saints opened the season with a thrilling 30-28 win over the Houston Texans.

Brees and Texans quarterback Deshaun Watson traded last minute heroics before Lutz nailed a walk-off field goal to give the Saints the win in a topsy-turvy season opener for both teams.

"It is crazy, that's an amazing win," Lutz said. "That's got to be the top-one moment for me."

Lutz's kick came just moments after Watson had driven the Texans 75 yards for a touchdown in two plays in front of a crowd of 73,000 Monday night at the Superdome stadium.

It gave the Saints a victory in their opener for the first time in six seasons.

"I knew we were going to get a chance," said Lutz. "You got Drew Brees at the helm, you are going to get a chance."

The final drama began with Houston's go-ahead drive with 50 seconds left as Watson connected with DeAndre Hopkins for a 37-yard gain.

Watson then connected with former Saint Kenny Stills for a 37-yard touchdown. Ka'imi Fairbairn missed the extra point, but Saints rookie CJ Gardner-Johnson brushed Fairbairn and a penalty was called. Fairbairn converted on the second attempt to snap the tie.

Brees then completed three passes for 35 yards and the Saints called their final timeout with two seconds left. They brought on Lutz, who had missed a 56-yarder on the final play of the first half.

"All I wanted was redemption after that miss at the half," he said.

New Orleans had lost their previous five season openers. And after last season ended with a bitter loss in the NFC title game, the Saints were hoping to begin the 2019 season on a winning note.

"I knew how big this win would be," Lutz said. "There was a little more weight on my shoulders on that one."

The 40-year-old Brees completed 32 of 43 passes. He threw one interception in the first half that could have proved costly. But he made up for it.

Asked what he was thinking on the last play, Brees said, "I think we all felt it was going to happen. The minute you heard the ball go off his foot, it was a thundering kick. We all knew it was going through the uprights."

Watson also ran for a 21 yard touchdown in the second quarter and Hopkins snagged two touchdown passes in the game.

Elsewhere, Derek Carr threw a touch-

down pass on the opening drive of the season and rookie Josh Jacobs rushed for two touchdowns as the Oakland Raiders defeated the Denver Broncos 24-16 in the late game.

BROWN DRAMA

The Raiders took out their frustrations over the drama surrounding former receiver Antonio Brown with a convincing win over the AFC West rival Broncos.

Carr completed 22 of 26 passes for 259 yards and wasn't sacked once after being dragged down 51 times last season. Jacobs had 23 carries for 85 yards and a 28-yard reception.

The loss spoiled the Broncos' debut of quarterback Joe Flacco, who was 21 of 31 for 268 yards with one touchdown pass.

MONDAY RESULTS

New Orleans 30 -28 Houston
Oakland 24-16 Denver

MLB

Astros bash seven homers, hammer A's

Reuters
Houston

Houston battered Oakland pitching for 11 runs on 12 hits - six of them home runs - in the first two innings as the Astros hammered the visiting Athletics 15-0 to set a franchise record for home wins on Monday night.

Robinson Chirinos went 3-for-4, crushed a pair of home runs and drove in a career-high-tying six runs to help the Astros match their club record with seven homers in a game.

Yordan Alvarez belted a pair of solo homers, and Alex Bregman clouted a three-run homer as Houston won for the fifth in a row and for the 17th time in the past 21 games.

Jose Altuve went 3-for-3 with a two-run homer and two runs, and Michael Brantley had a solo homer and two runs for Houston, which tallied 17 hits.

Starting pitcher Zack Greinke (15-5) beat the A's for the second time since being acquired by the Astros at the trade deadline. He tossed six scoreless innings of two-hit ball to improve to 5-1 with a 3.32 ERA since joining Houston.

The Astros moved to 56-17 at home, breaking the team record for home wins set in 1980 and 1998.

Oakland mustered just three hits and fell to 1 1/2 games behind idle Tampa Bay in the race for the first American League wild card. The A's are clinging to a half-game lead over the Cleveland Indians, who defeated the Los Angeles Angels 6-2 on Monday night.

Houston scored 21 runs in

a home win over Seattle on Sunday, then picked up in the first inning right where it left off, putting together six hits - five consecutive - and six runs against A's starter Mike Fiers (14-4).

Unbeaten in 21 consecutive starts, Fiers allowed deep shots to Bregman (his 35th), Alvarez (23rd) on the next pitch and Chirinos (16th) as the Astros built a 6-0 lead.

Alvarez's first blast broke Carlos Correa's 2015 record for most homers by a Houston rookie.

RESULTS

Astros	15-0	Athletics
Yankees	5-0	Red Sox
Mets	3-1	D'backs
Braves	7-2	Phillies
Brewers	8-3	Marlins
Cubs	10-2	Padres
Indians	6-2	Angels
Pirates	6-4	Giants

Altuve slugged a two-run shot, his 26th, in the second of an 8-0 lead, and Brantley lashed his career-high 21st in the next at-bat to chase Fiers from the game after just one-plus inning. The start was the shortest of Fiers' career, and the five home runs were the most he has allowed in a start.

Alvarez hit a mammoth blast off reliever Paul Blackburn later in the second, driving his 24th into the upper deck down the right field line for a 10-0 lead, and Chirinos added an RBI single.

Garrett Stubbs scored on a wild pitch in the sixth, and Chirinos clubbed a three-run long ball, his 17th, in the seventh. Bryan Abreu pitched two innings of one-hit ball, striking out three, and Cionel Perez fanned two batters in a perfect ninth to complete the shutout.



Houston Astros catcher Robinson Chirinos (left) celebrates with shortstop Alex Bregman after hitting a home run against the Oakland Athletics. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

NHL

Canadiens will not re-sign Markov

Reuters
Montreal

Montreal Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin said Monday that defenseman Andrei Markov will not return to the Montreal this season after a two-season sojourn in the Kontinental Hockey League.

Markov, 40, left the Canadiens after the 2016-17 campaign and signed with Ak Bars Kazan. He had spent his previous 16 NHL seasons with Montreal (he spent the 2004-05 lockout playing in Russia with Dynamo Moscow of the Russian Superleague), and the Canadiens are the only NHL team with which he has ever played.

"We have some young kids pushing and as far as where Andrei was two years ago, where our team was two years ago, things have changed," Bergevin said at the Canadiens annual golf tournament. "And now we're going, you know I call it a reset, refresh, and we did that, and now we're going

to keep in that direction." In August, Markov said he wanted to return to the franchise for what would likely be his final professional season. He has been practising in Florida.

OVECHKIN RETURNS TO ICE AFTER INJURY SCARE

Washington Capitals captain Alex Ovechkin was able to laugh off what initially appeared to be a serious injury during a scrimmage on Monday. Ovechkin went down awkwardly and reportedly screamed in pain before leaving the ice without putting any weight on his left leg.

The three-time Hart Trophy recipient was helped off the ice by teammates John Carlson, Tom Wilson and Nicklas Backstrom. Ovechkin, however, returned to the ice approximately 20 minutes later to resume skating.

Ovechkin, who turns 34 on Sept. 17, dismissed Monday's events as a continuation of a bad start to his week. "It's OK," he said, per NHL.com. "Last night I fell off my bike."



Defenseman Andrei Markov.

Red Sox fans give Ortiz standing ovation at Fenway

Batting legend David Ortiz threw out the ceremonial first pitch before Monday night's Boston Red Sox game against the New York Yankees at Fenway Park stadium.

This was Ortiz's first public appearance since being shot three months ago in his native Dominican Republic. Ortiz came out of the dugout to a standing ovation, then delivered the pitch to former teammate Jason Varitek.

"First of all, I want to thank God for giving me a second opportunity in my life to be here with all of you," Ortiz said. "I want to thank the Red Sox, my real fam-

ily. They always have been there for me, supporting me; they were aware what happened to me. And they were the first ones there supporting me. "Thank you very much, Red Sox family. I want to thank all of you for all the prayers; all of them came home. I really appreciate - thank you very much." The Red Sox failed to win for Ortiz, going down 5-0 after being out 12-7. Meanwhile, the Red Sox said a search for Dave Dombrowski's replacement would begin immediately. The club fired the president of baseball operations on Sunday.

BASKETBALL

Serbia buckled under World Cup expectations: coach

'We became favourites just like that, everybody was writing - not only in our papers but everywhere around the world - that we are the team, we are the ones, we will win'



Argentina's Luis Scola takes a shot during the Basketball World Cup quarter-final against Serbia in Dongguan yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Dongguan, China

Serbia's coach said that his strongly fancied team collapsed under the weight of expectation as they were stunned by Argentina in the Basketball World Cup quarter-finals yesterday.

The South Americans' grand old man Luis Scola knocked down a series of key buckets in a fourth-quarter surge to help crush Serbia 97-87 in the Chinese city of Dongguan.

Argentina are now undefeated in six games and headed for a Friday semi-final against reigning two-time champions the United States or France.

In yesterday's other quarter-

final, Spain's Ricky Rubio became the all-time leader for World Cup assists in a 90-78 win over surprise package Poland in Shanghai.

With Gregg Popovich's US squad unbeaten but still failing to convince, Serbia had emerged as favourites - but their coach Sasha Djordjevic said his players had buckled.

"It was euphoria in our country - everybody followed us, everybody gave us a hand, everybody was eager to see us play in this tournament," he said.

"We became favourites just like that, everybody was writing - not only in our papers but everywhere around the world - that we are the team, we are the ones, we will win," he added.

"Sometimes that does not help."

'WE DESERVE TO BE HERE'

For the Serbs, shooting guard Bogdan Bogdanovic of the NBA's Sacramento Kings led all scorers with 21 points, while Denver Nuggets big man Nikola Jokic added 16.

But it was Scola, 39 years old and the last remaining member of Argentina's "Golden Generation" that won the Olympics in 2004, who remains on course for another milestone.

The World Cup is the only major international trophy that he has yet to win. He finished with a team-high 20 points and Argentina were the more fluid throughout the contest.

Trailing most of the game, Serbia threatened to take control when they grabbed a 70-68 fourth-quarter lead on a three-pointer by the Memphis Grizzlies' Marko Guduric. That's when Scola stepped up, scoring eight rapid-fire points in a 21-6 Argentina run that dropped the curtain on Serbia's World Cup.

"It just bothers me that people keep talking about a miracle, keep talking about a surprise, keep talking about nobody believes it," said the veteran.

"This is far from a miracle - we are a good basketball team, we played great basketball all the way along, we deserve to be here."

HISTORY-MAKER RUBIO

Spain's coach Sergio Scariolo hailed Rubio after what he called a "tough war" with Poland.

Phoenix Suns' Rubio made an electric start for Olympic bronze medalists Spain, who will play

Australia or the Czech Republic in Friday's semis.

He had nine points in the first half and grabbed a record 107th career World Cup assist, surpassing Pablo Prigioni of Argentina.

Rubio finished the game with 19 points, nine assists and five rebounds against a Poland side who were back in the World Cup after a 52-year absence.

"Tonight is a really great night to congratulate Ricky as the best passer in the history of the World Cup," said Scariolo.

"It's huge and I really feel proud of him. This is his night."

Juan Hernangomez of the Denver Nuggets surged to 14 points before the break as Spain, ranked second in the world behind the United States, threatened to run riot.

CYCLING

Van der Poel wins Tour of Britain's fourth stage

AFP
Kendal, United Kingdom

Mathieu van der Poel took over as the Tour of Britain's overall leader after winning yesterday's fourth stage from Gateshead to Kendal.

The Dutchman who rides for Corendon-Circus made his move on a sharp rise in the closing stages of the 173.2km stage.

He tracked the three-rider breakaway before blowing away the rest of the reduced field, with Jasper De Buyst (Lotto-Soudal) and Simon Clarke (EF Education First) following him home and completing the podium.

Matteo Trentin (Mitchelton-Scott) finished in ninth place and conceded his race lead. Van der Poel is ahead by a second.

"It was a bit of gamble because I didn't really know where the finish line was," Van der Poel said of his push to the finish line.

"I got bumped in yesterday and I didn't want that to happen again today, so I went full gas 300 metres to go. It was a bit far but got I got a gap and the final 100m was a bit easier.

"It's really nice to win this stage. It was a really, really hard stage, with lots of climbing."

STAGE FOUR

1. Mathieu van der Poel (NED/COC) 4hr 23min 08sec, 2. Jasper De Buyst (BEL/LOT) at 3 secs, 3. Simon Clarke (AUS/EF1) s.t., 4. Ben Swift (GBR/INE) s.t., 5. Amund Grondahl Jansen (NOR/JUM) s.t

Roglic extends Jumbo-Visma contract

Leader Primoz Roglic was busy on the Vuelta a Espana's second rest day as Jumbo-Visma announced the Slovenian rider had extended his contract until the end of 2023. "I like the way this team works," the 29-year-old said yesterday. "I entered this team as a relative beginner and I have developed with the help of the team," he added. The Dutch outfit made the announcement on social media with a video which played on the former ski jumper's versatility. In it, team CEO Richard Plugge fields video calls from stars in other areas trying to recruit Roglic. Germany coach Joachim Loew, PSV Eindhoven general manager Toon Gerbrands and Barcelona star Frenkie de Jong try to recruit Roglic to football. Michael van Gerwen wants Roglic to play darts. Dutch singer Jan Smit asks if he can join his band and Plugge reminds Loew that Roglic is not German. "Primoz has developed enormously in recent years as a person and as an athlete, just like the team," said Merijn Zeeman, sporting director of Jumbo-Visma.

OVERALL STANDINGS

1. Mathieu van der Poel (NED/COC) 17hr 36min 27sec, 2. Matteo Trentin (ITA/MTS) at 1 sec, 3. Jasper De Buyst (BEL/LOT) at 7 secs, 4. Simon Clarke (AUS/EF1) at 14 secs, 5. Mike Teunissen (NED/Jumbo) at 15 secs

Williams half-year F1 finances reflect poor track showing

The Williams Formula One team posted a loss of 16.8 million pounds (\$20.77 million) in the six months to end-June compared to a previous profit of 0.2 million, reflecting the struggling former champions' plunging track performance. Williams, with Polish driver Robert Kubica and British rookie George Russell, are last in the championship with just one point from 14 of 21 races this season. In 2018, the sport's third most successful team in terms of race wins, finished 10th after ending 2017 fifth overall. Williams said the Formula One operation generated revenue of 46.3 million pounds compared to 60.7 million in the same period of 2018. The overall group EBITDA loss widened to 18.8 million pounds from 2.7 million. The company's Advanced Engineering arm increased revenue to 30.9 million pounds

from a previous 21.5 million. "The Formula One financial results primarily reflect our finishing position in last year's constructors' championship and the consequent reduction in prize money," said group chief executive Mike O'Driscoll in a statement. "There was also an overall reduction in partnership income compared to the first half of 2018." O'Driscoll said there were signs of improvement, with continued interest from potential partners. Talks with Formula One and commercial rights holders Liberty Media also held out hope of more equal competition in 2021. "Although we continue to face challenges in a very dynamic environment, we currently believe the majority of the impact on EBITDA for the full year has already been captured in these interim results," said O'Driscoll.

GOLF

Solheim Cup win would be career highlight: Matthew

AFP
London

Catriona Matthew says leading Europe to a Solheim Cup triumph on home soil would surpass winning her only major title a decade ago.

Matthew, who won the Women's British Open at Royal Lytham in 2009, captains the home side at Gleneagles this week as they seek to prevent the United States winning the biennial contest for the third straight time.

"To be a winning captain here would probably rank just above my British Open win," the 50-year-old Scot said yesterday.

"I've always felt the Solheim Cup has been a highlight of my career when it comes around every two years."

The United States are odds-on favourites to win the three-day event starting on Friday despite losing wildcard veteran Stacy Lewis to a back injury yesterday. Lewis has been replaced in the side by rookie Ally McDonald. "That's tough for them. We were in the same situation last time

with Suzann (Pettersen)," Matthew added.

"You feel sorry for Stacy, not to be able to play because you are injured is unlucky, but Ally McDonald is an able replacement."

Europe vice-captain Laura Davies was surprised to see her side rated as outsiders, adding: "I think we are 2/1 underdogs which I think would be a great bet."

"World rankings have a lot to do with it, but home soil outweighs most things."

Lewis had hoped to shake off her back injury but was pictured in tears on Monday after hitting shots on the Centenary Course, which also hosted the 2014 Ryder Cup.

"It's about what's best for the team and for me with my body, but the timing is pretty horrible," Lewis admitted.

"I'm glad we didn't do this press conference yesterday because I don't think I could have gotten a word out. It's really, really disappointing because this is my favourite tournament."

"There's nothing like that first tee and it's disappointing not to hit a shot but I'll be watching. I will be by Ally's side all week."



Ryder Cup star Barnes dies aged 74

British golfer Brian Barnes, who memorably beat Jack Nicklaus twice in one day at the Ryder Cup, has died aged 74.

Barnes, one of golf's most colourful characters, passed away on Monday after a short battle with cancer. "It was very sudden. I played a round of golf with him in May and he played 18 holes with no problem at all," Barnes's brother-in-law, Guy Faulkner, told the Press Association. Barnes was born in Addington, Surrey, and represented England at international level until 1971 when he joined the Scottish PGA.

He won nine European Tour titles but the defining moment of his career came in the 1975 Ryder Cup against the United States at Laurel Valley.

Barnes famously beat legendary American Jack Nicklaus 4&2 in the morning singles and 2&1 in an afternoon rematch.

"When we went to the press tent after the morning round everybody acted as if I'd beaten Jesus Christ," Barnes recalled in an interview with Today's Golfer in 2012.

"He was Jesus Christ as far as golf

was concerned, but he was still beatable."

Barnes was a larger-than-life personality who once marked his ball on the final hole of the 1982 Scottish Professional Championship with a beer can, then putted out for the win. He would regularly tee off with a hip flask of vodka and orange juice in his bag.

However, the drinking took its toll and Barnes came close to committing suicide before receiving treatment for alcoholism.

"Golf was a social game. I remember as a young pro being advised at a seminar by a doctor that four or five pints a day wouldn't harm you, nor 20 or 30 cigs. Times change," he told the Daily Mirror in 1996.

"I wasn't a fighting drunk. Booze made me easy-going... Gary Player once gave me a dressing down, told me I was wasting my talents."

Having won his fight against alcoholism, Barnes became eligible for the Seniors Tour in 1995 and lifted the British Open title at Royal Portrush that year, successfully defending the title at the same venue 12 months later.

RUGBY

Japan heat will suit our game, says NZ's Weber

AFP
Kashiwa

New Zealand scrum-half Brad Weber believes the All Blacks' high-tempo game will perfectly suit the hot and humid Japanese conditions as they seek to run opponents ragged in pursuit of a third straight World Cup.

Weber told reporters yesterday that the focus of the team's first training session in Japan was on getting used to the "pretty hot" conditions in Tokyo with temperatures hitting 35C.

But Weber insisted the All Blacks would relish the warmth, and the contrast with a New Zealand winter.

"New Zealanders in general, we like to play a fast game, up

tempo. I see these conditions suiting us perfectly," said the 28-year-old, who won his ticket to Japan off the back of a stand-out Super Rugby season for the Waikato Chiefs.

"We're all pretty keen to get amongst these conditions, because it's relatively cold and wet back home and we'll get some conditions we enjoy playing in."

Weber quipped that the weather was "just like summer in New Zealand," before admitting: "OK, maybe the humidity's a bit different."

Lock Sam Whitelock said that the change in temperature was fierce but teams that adapted their style to the conditions would prosper over the seven-week tournament.

"Because it's going to be warm, everyone's going to want to play expansive rugby but it's

about making sure you can control the tempo," said Whitelock, also part of the past two World Cup-winning teams.

'MASSIVE MATCH'

"You've got to have the ability to play a couple of different styles," he said.

The giant lock revealed that some players had taken to wrapping themselves in cold towels at training to get their body temperature down but stressed that two weeks was enough to acclimatise.

New Zealand open their title defence against South Africa on September 21 in what Whitelock said was "a massive match that will set the tone for our whole campaign."

The Springboks have already been in Japan for more than a week and ran out 41-7 winners against the Japanese Brave Blossoms in their final warm-up game.

"They are a very good side so I'm sure they will have been holding something back and I'm sure they'll keep something up their sleeve for us," said Whitelock.

The All Blacks training camp is in Kashiwa, east of Tokyo, and the city has embraced its famous guests with posters of the team all over town and autograph and selfie-hunters in replica black jerseys camped outside their hotel.

"We've had an awesome reception... it's pretty cool to see how hyped-up the city is to have us here," said Whitelock.

The team was welcomed to the city on Monday by dozens of children performing the All Blacks' traditional Haka battle cry, albeit a less scary version than that on the field.



TENNIS

US Open win shows hard-working Nadal is not finished yet

Spaniard has always played in Federer's long shadow but he is still capable of generating his own light



Rafael Nadal of Spain celebrates after winning the US Open final against Daniil Medvedev of Russia at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center. (Getty Images/AFP)

By Kevin Mitchell
The Guardian

Rafa Nadal has never taken his talent for granted. Of the three players who have defined his era, he is the most humble.

So, as he stands on the verge of surpassing Roger Federer's 20 majors and drawing away from the 16 owned by Novak Djokovic, he knows that beating one of the hunting pack, Daniil Medvedev, to win his fourth US Open was significant in more ways than one.

Sunday's teeth-grinding five-setter, which he could have ended way before its eventual four hours and 50 minutes duration, proved to everyone – including the winner – that, at 33, he has the will to continue.

For others of that age or thereabouts the questions are different: none dreams of bettering Federer or Djokovic; all of them are happy to be still standing, including Andy Murray, whose comeback from hip surgery con-

tinues steadily away from the main stage.

For Nadal it has always been like this. Since he won the first of his 19 majors – at Roland Garros, where he would win another 11 and where he surely will be favourite for as long as he wants – he has lived in Federer's shadow. So has Djokovic.

Often Federer's grace under pressure, his sheer artistry in a physical sport and his winning demeanour has made him unbeatable in the eyes of millions. Even when he loses they love him still.

There are books written about the love affair. No such tome exists for Nadal or Djokovic. They are praised prosaically, for the technical mastery they have over a difficult sport.

Yet those who have watched Nadal closely will have seen how the hard work he does away from the court manifests itself in subtle ways in the heat of battle – and there was a lot of heat on Sunday night when, after butchering a smash in the third set when he was close to a straight-

forward victory, he found ways to win. In front of him was a young opponent in his first slam final who displays aspects of Djokovic's stretching defence and Federer's outrageous cleverness. Nadal prevailed because he had seen it all before, however demanding the struggle became. Only bona fide champions can win when it looks likely they will lose.

After a 7-5, 6-3, 5-7, 4-6, 6-4 win that kept 24,000 fans swaying between the Spaniard and the Russian in their affections Nadal said: "The last three hours of the match were very, very intense, no? Very tough mentally and physically, too. The crowd were amazing, all these facts that make the moment super special, no? Unforgettable moment."

For once reference to the crowd was not fatuous. They more than likely did play a part. The New York fans are the loudest, most passionate and certainly most fickle in tennis.

At the start they were with Nadal. All fortnight Medvedev had wound them up, behaving like a brat at the beginning, then inviting their derision to give him strength and, finally, winning their admiration for the beauty of his game and his fighting heart in one of the truly great finals.

He was gobsmacked in a totally Russian way, repeating over and again what it meant to him to be part of history. "I'm sure even talking about Rafa's 19 grand slams, I'm sure he remembers his first final, even though he won it and I lost it. It was an amazing match. It's an amazing story. All this summer is amazing for me. I will remember every moment of it."

And there he nailed it. His summer roll is what carried him to the final. Medvedev had won all over the place leading up to the tournament, 12 matches in a row. Crucially, his most recent defeat had been to Nadal, a 6-3, 6-0 spanking in Montreal. But he is young enough for such a score not to unsettle his confidence or self-belief.

Like Bianca Andreescu, the 19-year-old Canadian who, the

night before, slew a legend in Serena Williams, Medvedev has the courage of youth. He is not scarred by serial failure. He believes that when he drop-shots from the baseline the ball will float silently over the net and do its job.

He did that time and again to Nadal, whose legs do not have the spring they once did. But Nadal did not fold. Nor did he complain. He drew on the thousands of similar circumstance he has been in to find a way.

He recognised in Medvedev not just the tennis qualities of Federer and Djokovic but the extra ingredient it takes to be different from the others. "The way that he fought, the way that he played, is a champion way," Nadal said. "Just well done for him. I really believe that he will have many more chances."

He meant that. He will not be around on the circuit to witness first hand all of Medvedev's score but he is not disappearing just yet. He is a remarkable champion and very much a unique one.

SPOTLIGHT

'Unstructure' at heart of Joseph's Japan masterplan

Reuters
Tokyo

Taking over from the charismatic and compelling Eddie Jones as Japan coach after their victory over South Africa four years ago was never going to be an easy task but Jamie Joseph has put his own mark on the Brave Blossoms.

Since taking over in 2016, the former New Zealand flanker, who also played at the 1999 World Cup for Japan, has focussed on evolving his players' mental state and creating an identity of dynamic, attacking rugby.

Joseph may shun the lime-light and is noticeably much less comfortable in front of the media than Jones, but with the aim of reaching the World Cup quarter-finals for the first time, he has Japan coming into their home tournament raring to go.

On the way to winning the Pacific Nations Cup last month, Japan chalked up 14 tries and 109 points during three matches, playing a free-flowing style of rugby that will entertain home fans at the World Cup.

Joseph's plans have been years in the making but it is over the past nine months the philosophy has really taken hold.

Due to a shortened Top League domestic season, Joseph and his coaching staff have essentially been in camp with their players since the beginning of the year and the 49-year-old now believes the foundations are in place for his ideas to flourish.

Japan's game is now based on "speed, skill and un-



structure", which Joseph believes best utilise his players' strengths but have required months of intensive fitness training and conditioning.

"The players are now fit enough to play that game," Joseph said when announcing his 31-man World Cup squad. "(The team) are training at a level 25 percent higher than test match rugby."

Flexibility is also key for Joseph, who has tried out a number of his more dynamic ball players in various positions across the backline.

The back three of Kenki Fukuoka, Kotaro Matsushima and Lomano Lemeki are all capable of disturbing any side and Joseph's plans centre around getting the ball in the hands of them as quickly, and as often, as possible.

It makes for some compelling, if fragmented, rugby that Joseph will be hoping is enough to unsettle Ireland and Scotland in Pool A.

If it does, then Joseph can achieve something Jones never could – taking Japan into the knockout stages of the World Cup for the first time.

FOCUS

Riske beats Kerber in Zhengzhou, Mladenovic through

Reuters
Beijing

American Alison Riske fought back from a set down to beat Germany's Angelique Kerber 5-7 6-4 7-6(6) in the first round of the inaugural Zhengzhou Open yesterday, extending the former world number one's poor run of form.

Riske held her nerve to save a match point in the third-set tiebreak before going on to inflict a fourth consecutive first-round defeat on Kerber, who was beaten by Kristina Mladenovic in her first match at the US Open.

The German, a three-times Grand Slam champion, was beaten in the second round at Wimbledon and suffered first round defeats in Toronto and Cincinnati in the run-up to the year's final Grand Slam at Flushing Meadows.

Mladenovic made short work of Chinese wildcard Duan Yingying earlier in the day, winning 6-2 6-3 to set up a second round meeting with fellow Frenchwoman and her former doubles partner Caroline Garcia.

"It was very tricky conditions. It's super humid and it's never easy to start a tournament," said Mladenovic, who won 79% of her first serve points during the match.

"Every first round is difficult and Yingying, I've played her in the past and she's a very powerful player with a big serve. I think the key today was the consistency on my serve, and I managed to read hers well, which is her biggest weapon."

Former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko beat 23-year-old Chinese qualifier You Xiaodi 6-3 0-6 6-2 to reach the last 16, while France's Fiona Ferro and Alize Cornet also advanced.

SPOTLIGHT

Abdulla joins French team for 24-hour off-road event

'I had an offer from the MMP Team, one of the best teams in France. They have good experience of cross-country and they offered me to be one of their four drivers'

By Sports Reporter
Fontaine-Fourches

Qatar's Adel Abdulla will make a dramatic return to off-road rallying action when he joins a French team to tackle the 27th edition of the esteemed 24-hour Tout Terrain de France, presented by Sofrat, at the Circuit de Fontaine-Fourches in northern France on September 14 and 15.

The former FIA T2 World Champion withdrew from the T3 category of this year's FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Bajas before August's Hungarian Baja, but the Doha-based driver was delighted to announce that he will compete for the MMP (Micoulev Mécanique Précision) Rallye Raid Team in a purpose-built Buggy entered in the T1A category at the marathon off-road encounter.

Adel joins forces with the well-known French off-road racer Matthieu Serradori and teammates Benjamin and Cedric Bujon to try and win the 24-hour event. The drivers will take it in turns to crew the Ooredoo-supported Buggy throughout the 24-hour duration of the event on the challenging off-road circuit.

The MMP Rallye Raid Buggy is equipped with a 3.6-litre Porsche turbo-diesel engine and power is delivered to the two rear driving wheels by a six-speed Sadev sequential gearbox. The car is built to full FIA specification and features an integral on-board tyre inflation and deflation system, AP Racing brakes and Donerre suspension.

One of France's premier off-road events has attracted a formidable field and the MMP team faces fierce competition across several classes. The event has attracted a near-capacity 74 entries with a wide range of cars as diverse as the powerful Bowler Wildcat, SSV vehicles like the Yamaha and the Can-Am, and more traditional off-road machines like the Mitsubishi Pajero, Range Rover and Toyota.

T1A is the largest of all the categories on the final round of the French Tout-Terrain Championship and Adel and his team will race against the likes of Philippe Boutron's BV4 Nissan and Jean-Pierre Strugo's Optimus MD that will also feature a guest driver appearance for five-time Dakar winner Cyril Despres.

Adel said: "I had an offer from the MMP Team, one of the best teams in France. They have good experience of cross-country and they offered me to be one of their four drivers for the 24 Hours. This is the last round of their championship and there are a lot of good drivers. "I am happy to do this race for the first



Adel Abdulla joins forces with the French off-road racer Matthieu Serradori to try and win the 24-hour event.

time and to be in a T1 car. It is an exciting new challenge for me and great experience. Maybe it will be the start of something else. The target for the team is to win this race. We hope to do a good team job and have a good strategy through the 24 hours and have a good result. We will carry out some official testing on Friday and I am looking forward to the weekend."

Fontaine-Fourches is a commune in the Ile-de-France region of north-central France, 120km south-east of Paris. Crews will pass technical and administrative checks on Friday afternoon (September 13) before qualifying heats take centre stage on Saturday morning.

The 24-Hour race will start at 16.00hrs on Saturday and the chequered flag will fall at the off-road circuit at 16.00hrs on Sunday, before the prize giving at 17.00hrs.



Adel Abdulla will take part in the 24-hour Tout Terrain de France in a Buggy.

FOCUS

10,000m European champion Amdouni trains at Aspetar

The 10,000m European champion **Morhad Amdouni** has begun his treatment programme at Aspetar, Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital. The French athlete will undergo intense rehabilitation to assist him reach his maximum potential following a hamstring injury he sustained earlier this year.

Amdouni said: "I am happy to be here, happy to be able to benefit from Aspetar facilities... Everything is available here that allows athlete to be in a good shape including heat training, it is important for me as I am running the marathon on October 5th".

Last year, Amdouni became the first Frenchman ever to win the European Championships 10,000m title, and a bronze medal at 5,000m in Berlin last year. The 10,000m European champion, who suffered a thigh injury, is forced to change his preparation for the Marathon in the World Championships in Doha.

Answering about his choice for treatment, Amdouni said: "I am here for a preventive reason, Aspetar is famous for injury prevention as well that helps athletes to keep in track and that will help me for my preparation for the upcoming world championship here in Doha."

The ten-day IAAF World Athletics Championships Doha 2019



will take place in the impressive Khalifa International Stadium, the stadium equipped with cooling systems to ensure optimum temperatures for competitors and fans within the venue, whilst Marathon will take place against the impressive skyline, along the city's Corniche, for the first time at midnight.

AL ARABI SIGN IBRAHIM ON LOAN

Doha: Al Arabi club has announced the signing of **Khalifan Ibrahim**, the former Al Rayyan star, on a one-year deal. Khalifan is a huge addition for Al Arabi as the club seeks to return to its glory days.

The Qatari player will start his Al Arabi career on Friday in QNB Stars League match against Umm Salal. Al Arabi started their QNB Stars League campaign with a 3-1 victory over Al Ahli then shared points with Al Duhail following a 1-1 draw.

Al Arabi ended last season in the sixth position with 30 points and the club aims to fight for trophies this season.



AL-ROBEAI JOINS SALAL ON LOAN FROM QATAR SC

Umm Salal has reached an agreement to sign Mohamed al-Robeai on a one-year loan deal from Qatar SC. Al-Robeai is a strong addition to Umm Salal's back line as the team seeks to make good results this season.

Umm Salal drew 2-2 with Al Rayyan in their QNB Stars League opener. The team suffered a 0-1 loss against Al Khor in Week Two. Umm Salal will take on Al Arabi in QNB Stars League Week Three.

QATAR SC DRAW WITH DELHI IN FRIENDLY

As part of their preparations to face Al Gharafa in Week 3 of the QNB Stars League this Saturday, Qatar SC played out a 2-2 draw with Delhi Dynamos in a friendly. Qatar SC's goals were scored by Ali Awad (43rd minute) and Uzbek striker Sardor Rashidov (86th-min penalty).

Qatar SC are eager to make a strong comeback to the league after losing in the first two rounds, to Al Duhail (1-2) and promoted side Al Wakrah (0-2). The Kings are 11th in the standings with no points.

QNB STARS LEAGUE

The league is more stronger this year: Wakrah captain Uvini

Bruno Uvini is riding The Blue Wave, the nickname of Al Wakrah, whom he captains. The Brazilian defender leads a group of spirited players as Al Wakrah, back in Qatar's top-flight football after two seasons, are targeting a respectable finish in the QNB Stars League. They had collected their first points by beating Qatar SC 2-0 in Week 2. In an interview with *qsl.qa*, Bruno gave his take on various topics. Excerpts

What're your impressions of football in Qatar?

The first impression is really positive. I've found it very organised. There are amazing stadiums with air-condition facility, which isn't normal to see anywhere in the world.

How competitive is the QNB Stars League in the 2019-20 season?

I had been following Qatar football all the years during my stint in the Gulf and I believe, this season, the league is more stronger. All teams have prepared very well, and all games will be difficult and also interesting to watch.

Al Wakrah are back in the top flight of Qatar football after two seasons...

This club deserves it. The administration and the coach (Marquez Lopez) played key roles in the comeback and now we're looking forward to a bright future for Al Wakrah.

How's it like playing for Wakrah?

I feel very much at home in this club

right from my first day here. The team management, fellow players and staff all treated me very well, and I'm trying to give off my best on the pitch.

Is the team strong enough to take on tough opponents?

Ours is almost a new squad, the players are learning how to complement each other. We have many young, but talented players. We have a great coach who is bringing the best out of us every day and has an interesting mentality about football.

How do you view your victory against Qatar SC in Week 2 of the QNB Stars League?

I think it was a smart game by us. We played as a team, didn't give many chances to opponents and utilised our opportunity to kill the game. It shows we're more mature as a team and we hope to improve after every match.

What're your targets, both collectively and individually?

Collectively, I came with the ambition of helping Al Wakrah earn a position as high as possible in the league standings. Individually, I came to work very hard and hope to utilise my experience to help both club and teammates.

How do you expect to contribute to the team's goals?

I've worked hard in every team I've played. Being a professional, I hope to do my best every day and that's how I achieved everything in my life so far. I'm keen to use my experience positive-



Al Wakrah captain Bruno Uvini (third right) celebrates with teammates during the 2-0 win over Qatar SC in the QNB Stars League.

ly in Al Wakrah.

How do you see the build-up to the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar?

Qatar is doing an amazing job pre-

paring for the World Cup. Two stadiums are ready for the tournament and that shows the perfect organisation already in place. I wish to be here during the World Cup to enjoy the experience.

You've represented the Brazil national team at various levels. How do you rate your experience?

Every Brazilian boy wants to be a

footballer. You dream of it from a very young age and I could even play in the senior national team. That was something unique in my life. I won't forget the moments I lived in the yellow jersey.