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Friday, May 3, 2019
Sha'baan 28, 1440 AH

GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

Finch tips fired-up Warner to dominate ICC World Cup

Page 3

ATHLETICS

Plenty at stake as Diamond League series opens today

'WE ARE GLAD TO SHOWCASE THE DIAMOND LEAGUE AT THE KHALIFA INTERNATIONAL STADIUM'



Qatar Athletics Federation President Dr Thani al-Kuwari makes his opening remarks during a press conference yesterday as IAAF President Sebastian Coe (third from left) and elite athletes scheduled to participate in today's Doha Diamond League meeting look on.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

An exciting and glittering opening of the IAAF Diamond League 2019 season is anticipated as the prestigious series gets underway at the Khalifa International Stadium in Doha today.

For the tenth consecutive year, Qatar is hosting the season-opening meet of the highly-successful athletics top-tier series and IAAF President Sebastian Coe noted at the well-attended press conference yesterday.

"Doha is definitely the centre of the world for athletics in 2019 considering the array of events and tournaments culminating with the 2019 IAAF World Championships to be held here later in the year.

The press conference was attended by the Qatar Athletics Federation (QAF) President Dr Thani Abdulrahman al-Kuwari, triple European sprint champion, Dina Asher-Smith (GBR), Olympic long jump champion, Tianna Bartoletta of the USA, Olympic pole vault bronze medalist, Sam Kendricks (USA), New Zealand's world shot put champion, Tom Walsh and Brianna McNeal of the USA, the Olympic 110m hurdles champion, with other athletes and officials.

This year's leg of the IAAF Diamond League in Doha is parading a star cast which includes six reigning world champions, eight reigning Olympic champions and winners of nine 2018 Diamond Trophies.

"We are glad to showcase the Diamond League at the Khalifa International Stadium tomorrow," Dr al-Kuwari said in welcoming address.

TODAY'S SCHEDULE

5.35PM: 4x100m Girls	6.42PM: 800m Men National
5.41PM: 4x100m Boys	6.55PM: High Jump Women
5.50PM: 4x100m Mixed	7PM: Long Jump Women
5.58PM: Medley Relay Boys	7.04PM: 400mH Women
6.08PM: 100m Girls Qatar National Team	7.15PM: 800m Men
6.16PM: 100m Boys Qatar National Team	7.37PM: 3000mSC Men
(The above events are not part of the Diamond League)	7.56PM: 200m Men
6.20PM: Pole Vault Men	8PM: Shot Put Men
6.33PM: 400m Men National	8.07PM: 800m Women
6.35PM: Discus Men	8.19PM: 1500m Men
	8.34PM: 200m Women
	8.46: 3000m Women

"This year, QAF has double reasons to celebrate. We are celebrating ten years of Diamond League in Doha and the relocation to the new home of athlete at Khalifa International Stadium.

"It is my pleasure to welcome all participants to new venue after nine years of hosting this global event at the Qatar Sports Club. We are very pleased that you will be joining us for what promises to be another exciting time of athletics in Qatar."

In his address, Coe said, "The IAAF Diamond League is increasing in popularity every year and we now have about 370 million people from about 170 countries watching the league annually.

"We feel it there is a need to make it bigger and better and that's what have necessitated the review of the format as we go into the tenth year anniversary."

Coe added that due to the importance of the IAAF Diamond

League to the athletics body, the IAAF is responding to feedback from the various stakeholders - athletes, fans, broadcasters, administrators with the new format of the league which is scheduled to begin from the 2020 season.

The 2020 IAAF Diamond League will include the very best 12 meetings, based on the criteria developed in 2018, leading to a single final at the end of the season. An agreed 24 disciplines (12 male and 12 female) will run across the 12 meetings and the final, with the longest discipline being the 3,000m.

Each meeting will be broadcast globally in a faster-paced 90-minute television event which will link the events and the athletes' points so fans can more readily follow the road to a single final at the end of the season.

"The IAAF Diamond League is very important because it is one of the major ways millions

of people absorb our sport every year and it is a responsibility that we don't take lightly," Coe explained.

"I am happy with what we've done with the new format and as you know, the criteria has become tougher which will make the league more interesting. We are looking forward to a more exciting event and of course the IAAF World Championships in September is something everyone can't wait enough to see it start," he added.

Meanwhile, Asher-Smith, who is in the Middle East for the first time, has expressed her delight participating at the Doha IAAF Diamond League.

"It is exciting to be here in Doha for the first time and to start my season at the same venue of the 2019 IAAF World Championships.

"I can't wait to compete on the beautiful tracks and I hope all goes as planned tomorrow," said the British record holder in the 100m and 200m (10.85 and 21.89 respectively), achieved at the European Championships last August.

On his part, Kendricks, who is also appearing in Doha for the very first time said:

"Every Diamond League is important and I'm glad to be here. Though for us in the States, the season starts a bit earlier due to the spring season but this is my first major competition of the year.

"I've had a couple of good jumps and I'm hoping to jump at least 5.95m tomorrow - I hope the aim is achieved. The field

is strong and the competition is tough but I think I am set and let's see how things turn out tomorrow."

To Olympic long jump champion, Bartoletta - Doha has always brought her fond memories:

"I've had good experiences here and each visit had been quite interesting. Even when I wasn't expecting it, I ended up doing well and I think Doha has been generally good to me. I hope the luck continues tomorrow and I will be glad to win again in Doha," said the 33-year-old who won the 2015 Doha event before going on to win the World Championships in Beijing later that year.

Brianna McNeal on the other hand, the runner-up in 200m at last year's event, said she is more motivated to perform better this year:

"I'm very focused on what I need to do and I'm very prepared to give my best tomorrow. I hope to improve on my performance last year and I think I am in the right frame to win," she said.

Tom Walsh believes that with USA's Ryan Crouser's current throw of 22.74m in 2019, which is the longest throw in the world since 1990 - the bar has already been set so high early in the season and this is going to be a great challenge for every other person to meet up with:

"Crouser has raised the bar for all of us and I believe the competition is going to be tough this year. I will definitely do my best and let's see how things turn out," he said.

Crouser is now the sixth best performer of all time and he will be on the field when the season kicks off today.

Semenya to run in Doha before new rule kicks in



Doha, AFP: Caster Semenya

has responded to losing her legal challenge against new gender rules by entering the 800 metres in today's Doha Diamond League meeting, while she hinted at ending her career in several cryptic tweets. Semenya, the double Olympic champion at the distance, was added to the 800m start list yesterday morning, a day after her appeal against a new rule regulating testosterone levels for women athletes was rejected by the Court for Arbitration of Sport (CAS).

Doha organisers said the South African runner had waited for the outcome of Wednesday's CAS hearing in Lausanne, Switzerland, before deciding whether to run in the meeting that opens the Diamond League season.

Semenya had challenged the measures, introduced by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), that will force women with higher than normal male hormone levels - so-called "hyperandrogenic" athletes - to artificially lower the amount of testosterone in their bodies if they are to continue competing.

The rules will come into effect on May 8 and will apply to races over distances of 400m to the mile. Semenya hinted at quitting the sport in a tweet yesterday, saying: "Knowing when to walk away is wisdom. Being able to be courageous. Walking away with your head held high is dignity." In a later tweet, she said: "They laugh at me because I am different. I laugh at them because they're all the same."

Semenya was not present at a press conference in the Qatari capital to hear IAAF president Sebastian Coe defend the CAS decision, saying it helped to

create a level playing field in the women's events.

"I think this is pretty straightforward, and it's very straightforward for any international federation in sport," Coe said. "Athletics has two classifications: it has age, it has gender, we are fiercely protective about both and I am really grateful that the Court of Arbitration has upheld that principle."

The two athletes who finished in the silver and bronze medal positions behind Semenya in the 800m at the 2016 Rio Olympics, Burundi's Francine Niyonsaba and Margaret Wambui of Kenya, will race against her in Doha today. Wambui, who has also faced questions over her testosterone levels but unlike Semenya has not been forced to undergo tests for hyperandrogenism, criticised the IAAF ruling.

"This life sometimes is so unfair," Wambui wrote on Twitter: "Everything that happens, happens with a reason Caster." She added: "This is life we Africans have nothing to say in this world and (there is) nothing we can do about it, so pole (sorry) my dear - so painful."

Indian sprinter Dutee Chand, who won a long battle with authorities over her own hyperandrogenism, told AFP that Semenya's court defeat was "wrong", but backed her to overcome the potentially far-reaching ruling.

"This is wrong. I feel sad for her, she has been made to suffer like me," Chand, 23, said. "I think she and her team will find a way out. She is an Olympic medalist and her country is behind her." If Semenya refuses to take the hormone medication to lower her testosterone levels she could decide to step up to 5,000m, a distance not covered by the IAAF's rules.

MORE STORIES ON PAGE 2



NOTHING TO LOSE

Qatari hopefuls unfazed by their elite rivals

Despite competing on the international senior stage for the first time, Qatari representatives Jaber al-Mamari and Owaab Barrow are unfazed by the strength of the 200m field they will be up against at the 2019 IAAF Doha Diamond League in the impressive Khalifa International Stadium today.

"I count it a privilege competing in the home stadium and I am ready to push myself and achieve the best result possible on Friday," Barrow, who won the gold medal in 110m hurdles at last year's Youth Olympics in Buenos Aires, said.

"It is good to be part of the competition and I believe the experience is quite necessary for the advancement of my career. I am not afraid of challenges and I will simply be myself



Owaab Barrow and Jaber al-Mamari

and do my stuff on Friday."

The Qatari who started out as a footballer before venturing into athletics will, alongside his compatriot al-Mamari, be up against an elite field comprising of stars like reigning 200m world champion, Ramil Guliyev and Nethaneel Mitchell-Blake, a 4X100m relay world champion.

"I've had very strong support starting out in my career especially from the Aspire Academy and it's been great all this while. I've been privileged to compete in Europe, Australia and of course – the Youth Olympics in Argentina is one of the major highlights of my career," he said.

The 18-year-old hopes to make the cut for the IAAF World Championships in September, especially considering the importance of the event

to every Qatari athlete.

"My major aim at the moment is to be part of the IAAF World Championships and I hope I will achieve that. I believe the competition will be one of the best ever and all attendees are assured of the best of hospitality and exciting times in Doha," he added.

For al-Mamari, competing against the "big guys" is a great privilege and he hopes to be able to get helpful tips and techniques from them.

"Everyone passes through this stage at one point or the other in life and I think it is awesome sharing the same track with the top athletes.

"I am going to ask them some questions on Friday which will be useful for me and I'm definitely going to give my best and who knows, a miracle can happen," he said.

SPOTLIGHT

CAS ruling won't end intersex and transgender debate

Tennis great Navratilova terms the ruling 'dreadfully unfair' and 'wrong in principle'

DPA
Berlin

The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) ruling on testosterone levels for women in certain athletics events may have settled the case of Caster Semenya and others for now but the CAS itself made it clear that the issue is far from over.

And the debate around intersex and transgender athletes could also affect other sports, with the International Olympic Committee already in the process of looking into updated guidelines for itself and other sports federations on how to handle this sensitive matter.

The IOC said it wants to "shape sport specific policies and regulations in relation to fairness, safety, inclusivity, and non-discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sex characteristics."

That is a big task, given the difficulties CAS itself noted in an executive summary. "Natural human biology does not map perfectly onto legal status and gender identity.

The imperfect alignment between nature, law and identity is what gives rise to the conundrum at the heart of this case," the court said. Semenya was disappointed by the outcome, the two-time Olympic and three-time 800-metre world champion having brought the case to CAS in order to prevent the ruling athletics body IAAF from introducing a new testosterone level cap for herself and others in running events from 400m to the mile.

Believed to be intersex (results of gender tests have never been officially published), Semenya must now lower her natural testosterone level by May 8 through medication if she wants to compete at the IAAF World Championships later this year, or switch to other events such as the 5,000m where she became national champion last weekend.

Semenya said she has been specifically targeted by the IAAF for a decade but insisted, "I will once again rise above" while her South African federation ASA said it was "reeling in shock at the how a body held in high esteem like CAS can endorse discrimination without flinching.

There was also sharp criticism elsewhere.

"Women with intersex variations have the same right to dignity and control over their bodies as other women, and it's deeply disappointing to see CAS uphold regulations that run afoul of international



Court of Arbitration (CAS) Secretary General Matthieu Reeb speaks to journalists after pronouncing the verdict in South African double Olympic champion Caster Semenya's appeal against International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) testosterone rules on May 1, 2019 in Lausanne.

human rights standards," said Liesl Gerntholtz, deputy executive director of Human Rights Watch.

"In scrutinising and excluding women competitors based on their natural hormone levels, the IAAF regulations stigmatise, stereotype, and discriminate against all women." Tennis great Martina Navratilova termed the ruling "dreadfully unfair" and "wrong in principle" on her website.

"She has done nothing wrong and it is awful that she will now have to take drugs to be able to compete. General rules should not be made from exceptional cases and the question of transgender athletes remains unresolved," Navratilova said.

And German Balian Buschbaum, who underwent a sex change after being a successful pole vaulter as Yvonne Buschbaum, bluntly told dpa: "I would really like to know what Usain Bolt would say if he was given hormones to shrink his legs. Nothing else is asked of Semenya."

But marathon world record holder Paula Radcliffe defended the CAS because it ruled "that women's sport needs rules to protect it." And German athletics federation chief Juergen Kessing named it "a precedent for the whole of high-performance sports."

The CAS had acknowledged that the IAAF regulations are "discriminatory" but that "such discrimination is a necessary, reasonable and proportionate means

of achieving the IAAF's aim of preserving the integrity of female athletics in the restricted events."

Germany's *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* said it was obvious that "a clearer distinction between men and women is needed in sport compared to normal life." But it said that if athletes like Semenya needed to lower their performance then others must live with certain natural disadvantages and no longer get exceptions to use asthma sprays or other substances to boost their performances. Britain's *The Guardian* said "CAS tried to provide a clear verdict on Caster Semenya but left a tangled mess" because "its ruling contained enough holes and caveats to mean the dispute will continue."

FOCUS

Semenya 'made to suffer', says Indian gender-row sprinter

AFP
New Delhi

Indian gender-row sprinter Dutee Chand yesterday said Caster Semenya's court defeat over testosterone rules was "wrong", but backed the Olympic 800 metres champion to overcome the potentially far-reaching ruling.

Chand, who fought and won a long battle over her own hyperandrogenism, or elevated levels of male sex hormones, said she felt sorry for the South African star, whose career has been plagued by controversy.

"This is wrong. I feel sad for her, she has been made to suffer like me," Chand, 23, told AFP.

Chand, who was subjected to humiliating gender-testing as a teenager, was finally cleared to compete last year after winning a court appeal against International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) regulations.

Chand successfully challenged the IAAF's stance on hyperandrogenism, prompting the world governing body to change its rules to target only middle-distance events, arguing these were most affected by elevated testosterone.

But on Wednesday, the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne dismissed Semenya's appeal against the IAAF measures, triggering an angry response in South Africa.

The decision means that women with elevated testosterone will have to take suppressive treatment if they wish to compete as females in certain events.

To defend her title at the world

championships in September, Semenya, 28, will now have to take medication, probably including birth control pills. She is now weighing an appeal.

Chand, who won 100m and 200m silver at last year's Asian Games, her first major event since returning to competition, was hopeful that Semenya's legal team will find a way to succeed.

"It was my legal team that handled her case. The team that fought my case, I handed them over to Caster Semenya," Chand said.

"I think she and her team will find a way out. She is an Olympic medalist and her country is behind her."

The CAS ruling raised several concerns about the IAAF regulations, calling them "discriminatory" and questioning their implementation, as well as the lack of evidence proving an advantage from higher testosterone levels.

"See this (the condition) is natural. To increase and decrease testosterone levels is not in our hand. Now medical scientists can guide her," said Chand.

"But she is not poor like me and is well known with a lot of money and resources," said Chand, who was born in rural poverty.

The court decision drew anger from officials and fans in South Africa, whose minister for women, Bathabile Dlamini, called it "the violation of her rights as human being".

Semenya, who won the 800m Olympic title in 2012 and 2016, vowed to "once again rise above and continue to inspire young women and athletes in South Africa and around the world".



File photo of Indian sprinter Dutee Chand.

BOTTOMLINE

ASA may approach Swiss tribunal after Semenya's CAS setback

Reuters
Cape Town

Athletics South Africa (ASA) is considering approaching the Swiss Federal Tribunal after the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) dismissed Caster Semenya's appeal against regulations to limit naturally-occurring testosterone levels in athletes with differences of sexual development (DSDs).

The national governing body for athletics was "deeply disappointed and profoundly shocked" as a CAS panel dismissed the appeal by dou-

ble Olympic 800-metres champion Semenya against the implementation of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) regulations.

"ASA respects the CAS decision and will now review the ruling and decide whether to consider the option of taking this matter to the Swiss Federal Tribunal within the 30 days as stipulated in the ruling," it said in a statement.

"We are, however, reeling in shock at the how a body held in high esteem like CAS can endorse discrimination without flinching.

"We are deeply disappointed and profoundly shocked that the CAS award is in favour of up-

holding the new IAAF regulations for female athletes." ASA went on to compare the regulations to apartheid, where South African citizens were separated by racial group and afforded differing rights based on their skin colour.

"South Africa knows discrimination better and CAS has seen it fit to open the wounds of Apartheid, a system of discrimination condemned by the whole world as a crime against humanity.

"For CAS does not only condone discrimination, but also goes to lengths to justify it, (which) only undermines the integrity that this body is entrusted with. We believe their deci-

sion is disgraceful."

ASA said "compelling" evidence had been placed before the CAS.

"ASA was confident of a favourable outcome given the human rights, medico-legal and scientific arguments and evidence that we believe invalidated the regulations.

"It is these facts that have left ASA shocked that CAS rejected these compelling factors in favour of the IAAF.

"Given the profound and global effect, plus consequences the implementation of the regulations will have, the regulations may warrant to be tested in a higher tribunal with jurisdiction to

pronounce on the CAS ruling."

CAS ruled the regulations were necessary for female athletes with DSDs who compete in events ranging from 400-metres to a mile.

This is to ensure fair competition by medically limiting their blood testosterone level to under 5 nmol/L, which is double the normal female range of below 2 nmol/L.

The IAAF welcomed the verdict on Wednesday, saying it was "pleased that the regulations were found to be a necessary, reasonable and proportionate means of achieving the IAAF's legitimate aim of preserving the integrity of female athletics in the restricted events".

IPL

Mumbai in playoffs after super-over win against Hyderabad

'We are rewarded for some real hard work we have put in throughout the tournament. We played consistent cricket and have the results for it'

IAN S
Mumbai

Mumbai Indians defeated Sunrisers Hyderabad via super over at the Wankhede Stadium yesterday to become the 3rd team after Chennai Super Kings and Delhi Capitals to reach the playoffs of the 2019 Indian Premier League.

Hardik Pandya six helping them chase the required nine runs with three balls to spare.

Sunrisers Hyderabad, who had reached the final in the 2018 IPL and lost to Chennai Super Kings, must now beat Royal Challengers Bangalore in their final group game on Saturday and hope the other results go their way to seal the fourth playoff spot. Manish Pandey and Mohamed Nabi, whose partnership had brought back the Sunrisers into the game, could only last four balls in the super over. Pandey was run out first ball before Nabi, having struck Jasprit Bumrah for a top-edged six, was clean bowled.

"We are rewarded for some real hard work we have put in throughout the tournament. We played consistent cricket and have the results for it," Mumbai captain Rohit Sharma said.

Earlier Mumbai rode opener Quinton de Kock's valiant knock of 69 (unbeaten) off 58 balls to post 162/5 in 20 overs.

Despite getting little support from the other end, de Kock kept his cool and helped the three-time champions reach a respectable total. The opener's knock contained six boundaries and two hits into the stands.

Opting to bat, Mumbai were off to a decent but cautious start with scoreboard reading 26/0 in the initial three overs. While Rohit Sharma (24 off 18) clobbered Hyderabad bowlers, de Kock played second fiddle to the Mumbai captain. Khaleel



Mumbai Indians' Hardik Pandya (right) and Kieron Pollard celebrate after winning the 2019 Indian Premier League match against Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. (AFP)

Ahmed drew the first blood for his side and sent back a dangerous looking Rohit in the sixth over, leaving Mumbai at 36/1. The Mumbai skipper played an overambitious pull-shot on a delivery that bounced a bit more and popped up in the air only to be caught by Mohammed Nabi at mid-on. Incoming batsman Suryakumar Yadav (23 off 17) and de Kock then tried to repair the early damage, adding 54 runs for the second wicket. Just when the home side were ap-

proaching the three-digit mark, Khaleel struck again to break the partnership.

He cut short Suryakumar's stay in the middle, reducing Mumbai to 90/2 in 11.2 overs.

Nabi spelled further trouble for Mumbai and just after the addition of a run, he packed back Evin Lewis (1 off 6) in the 13th over. Hardik Pandya then played a quick 10-ball 18, with the help of a four and a six. But the Mumbai all-rounder failed to spend much time in the mid-

dle as Bhuvneshwar Kumar applied brakes on his innings in the 16th over, with Mumbai placed at 119/4. Kieron Pollard (10 off 9) and de Kock then shared a short 32-run partnership for the fifth wicket, helping their side cross the 150-run mark in 18.5 overs.

Pollard was dismissed in the final over by Khaleel before Krunal Pandya chipped in with an unbeaten 9 off three balls as Mumbai reached a fighting total. For the visitors, Kha-

leel bagged three wickets for 42 runs and Bhuvneshwar and Nabi got one wicket each.

BRIEF SCORES
Mumbai Indians 162 for 5 (de Kock 69*, Khaleel 3-42) beat **Sunrisers Hyderabad** 162 for 6 (Pandey 71*, Nabi 31, Krunal 2-20) via the Super Over
Super Over
Mumbai Indians 9 for 0 (Hardik 7*, Pollard 2*) beat **Sunrisers Hyderabad 8** (Nabi 6, Pandey 1, Guptill 1, Bumrah 2-8).

SPOTLIGHT

All-rounder Archer set for England debut against Ireland

AFF
London

Jofra Archer is set to make his England debut when Eoin Morgan's men face Ireland in a one-day international in Malahide today.

The 24-year-old Barbados-born all-rounder was called into a senior England squad for the first time last month after qualifying on residency grounds.

He was not included in the tournament hosts' 15-man provisional squad for the World Cup. But Archer can stake a claim by impressing for world number one team England in their one-off game against Ireland and upcoming series at home to Pakistan before the World Cup squad is finalised on May 23.

Middlesex batsman Dawid Malan and Surrey wicketkeeper-batsman Ben Foakes, a replacement for the injured Sam Billings, are also set to win their first one-day international caps on Friday.

Morgan, confirming Sussex star Archer's inclusion, told Sky Sports: "He obviously brings a lot of excitement, along with skill level. He's been around for the last few years. I've played against him and he's bowled extremely well when I've played against him."

"He was delighted (when he was told). I think his mum and dad are over. Debuts are all about celebrating what's gone before and recognising the start of a new journey and for Jofra it's obviously very exciting."

Archer has impressed in the lucrative Twenty20 Indian Premier League this season for the Rajasthan Royals, where his teammates included established England all-rounder Ben Stokes.

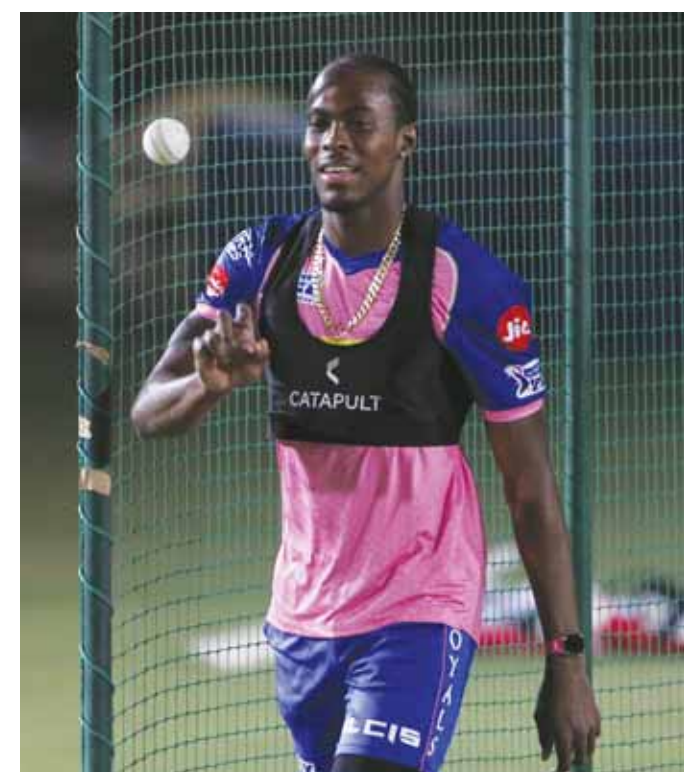
He completed a three-year qualification period in March after the England and Wales Cricket Board changed its residency rules.

Under the previous system, Archer would not have been eligible until 2022 after a seven-year residency.

The prospect of Archer, whose father is English, playing at the World Cup has caused concern among several more established England rivals for a pace-bowling berth including Chris Woakes, David Willey and Mark Wood, amid suggestions his inclusion could damage team morale.

But former England seamer Dominic Cork said his inclusion was "an absolute must".

"I've watched him the last three weeks in Mumbai, playing for Rajasthan," added Cork. "You've got someone who can bowl at the pace that he can. He can bowl in that first powerplay, in the middle and at the end."



Barbados-born all-rounder Jofra Archer

CSA calls for Rabada's scans after DC pacer complains of back pain

With the World Cup less than a month away, Cricket South Africa (CSA) are in a spot of bother with their pace spearhead Kagiso Rabada complaining of discomfort in his back as he plies his trade for Delhi Capitals in the Indian Premier League.

While DC rested Rabada for the game against Chennai Super Kings on Wednesday, his scan reports have been sent to CSA to decide on the future course of action.

Speaking to IANS, a senior DC official in

the know of developments said that all tests have been done on the pacer and the reports have been sent to CSA and they will decide on the pacer's further participation in the cash-rich league this season.

"He just complained of discomfort and we got all the tests done because we don't wish to take a chance with any of our players. With the World Cup round the corner, even CSA got in touch with us and we spoke to them and have now sent them the reports. They will check the reports

and get back to us on how to go about Rabada's participation in the IPL. "He has had an issue with his back and there is no point in risking him. We as a franchise also respect the fact that this is the year of the World Cup," the official explained.

If CSA does stop the pacer's participation in this edition of the cash-rich league to keep Rabada fresh for the World Cup, starting in England and Wales on May 30, it will be a big blow for Delhi going into the

playoff stages of the IPL. Rabada is currently the Purple Cap holder in the tournament with 25 wickets from 12 games. Second on the list is his South Africa teammate Imran Tahir. The Chennai Super Kings spinner has picked 21 wickets from 13 games. Delhi Capitals in fact missed Rabada's services in the game against Chennai at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Wednesday as they lost to M.S. Dhoni's men by 80 runs after being bundled out for just 99.

Azam's century lifts Pakistan in tour stroll

Pakistan opener Babar Azam smashed his first Twenty20 hundred to inspire his country's 58-run win over Leicestershire in a tour match on Wednesday. Azam hit two sixes and 13 fours in his 63-ball innings of 101 at Grace Road.

He put on an opening stand of 104 with Fakhar Zaman, who scored 52 from 30 balls, as the tourists reached 200 for six in their 20 overs. Ben Mike was the pick of the Leicestershire attack with three

for 38, including the wicket of Azam, while Dieter Klein also chipped in with a pair of wickets. In reply, Leicestershire got off to a poor start as the home side were reduced for 39 for three in the sixth over.

Wickets continued to fall at steady intervals and the only partnership of note came late on when Mike and Callum Parkinson put on 59 for the ninth wicket before Leicestershire were dismissed for 142 in 19.2 overs.

FOCUS

'Huge hunger' - Finch tips fired-up Warner to dominate

AFF
Sydney

Australia captain Aaron Finch believes David Warner will enter this year's World Cup desperate to prove himself as the disgraced batsman prepares to rejoin his teammates after a ball-tampering ban.

Warner has been in red-hot form in the India Premier League after completing a 12-month suspension for cheating, averaging 69.20 in 12 innings, including a century and eight fifties.

Finch expected the fiery batsman to also dominate on the international stage, providing a massive boost for Australia as the reigning champions chase a sixth World Cup trophy.

"He's coming back with a huge hunger, not just to perform well for his franchise, but to dominate international cricket again," Finch told Melbourne commercial radio

Wednesday. "When you have your dream taken away from you for 12 months, I can imagine there's something inside you that burns really strongly."

Finch said the ban, imposed after Warner masterminded the "Sandpaper-gate" scandal in Cape Town last year, had given the 32-year-old a chance to refresh his game. "He's a super player, we know how destructive he can be," he said. "I think having time off to spend with his family and get away from the game (was important)."

Warner and former Australian captain Steve Smith, who was also banned over the cheating scandal, will officially rejoin the Australian squad for the first time at a training camp in Brisbane on Friday.

Finch did not expect any problems re-integrating them into the team, even though the former captain and deputy will have to defer to a new leadership team. He said he would consult the pair about on-field tactics.

"I'll be using them as much as

I can tactically because they've both captained a lot of cricket and are very good captains on the field," he said. "It would be really naive of me not to lean on them."

Finch also revealed he feared for his own spot on the team after a recent barren run, although he believed he had now returned to form.

"In the back of your mind you're thinking, 'Gee, the World Cup isn't far away, as a captain I could be left out of the squad,'" he said.

"Then you start putting unrealistic pressure on yourself to perform."

Finch had an unsuccessful spell in the Test side last year, averaging 27.80 in five matches, and conceding that at 32 his career in the long-form game was over.

"My chances to play Test cricket again have probably slipped away," he said.

"I'm still very grateful for the opportunity... I'm OK with that because I gave it everything I could."



SRH's David Warner (left) in action against Kings XI Punjab during their IPL match in Hyderabad on April 29, 2019. (AFP)

CHINA OPEN GOLF

Campillo hunts more glory after stunning 65 in first round

Spaniard won his maiden European Tour title at the 229th attempt last Sunday

AFP
Shenzhen, China

Spain's Jorge Campillo kept up his red-hot form with a flawless seven-under-par 65 to stand in a three-way tie for the lead after the first round of the 25th Volvo China Open yesterday.

The Spaniard won his maiden European Tour title at the 229th attempt at Morocco's Trophee Hassan II last Sunday and showed no sign of slowing down in good scoring conditions in Shenzhen.

An eagle three at the par-five ninth, allied to four birdies saw him complete a stunning front nine in six under par at the rain-softened Genzon Golf Club layout.

A 20-foot putt to save par at the 12th crucially kept a bogey off his card and a further birdie at the par-five 17th saw him share top rung on a packed leaderboard with David Lipsky and Tapio Pulkkanen.

"I got a few nights sleep so it was good and I played all right," said Campillo of his dash across seven time zones from North Africa to play in the far east.

"The eagle on nine was the highlight. I hit a great hybrid on nine. I got an easy putt uphill and I made it. "If I can keep playing like this I'll hopefully have a chance on the weekend."

American Lipsky and Finland's Pulkkanen, who both enjoyed top 10 finishes in Morocco, had set the early clubhouse target with their own rounds of 65 in the morning. "I played well and I got my putter working today," said the in-form Lipsky who was fifth in Morocco. "I hit it all right, not great, but I think I holed 150 feet of putts today so that always helps."

Pulkkanen, who finished eighth in Morocco, birdied four of his last six holes to join the American. "I started slowly with only two birdies in the front nine but five birdies on the back nine so it was great," said Pulkkanen.

Wu Ashun and Jin Daxin led the home charge with a pair of 66s to lie just a shot



Jorge Campillo of Spain hits a tee shot during the first round of the China Open in Shenzhen yesterday. (AFP)

adrift, in a tie for fourth alongside John Catlin. "I will just stay with my game," said the 2015 China Open champion Wu. "A lot of things can happen, let's see."

Catlin was also trying not to get ahead of himself. "We have a long way to go - 54 more holes - so you've just got to keep going," said the American. China's

number one and crowd favourite Li Haotong received one of the biggest ovations of the day when he birdied the 18th in rain and near darkness to join an eight-way tie for seventh on five-under 67.

"It was a solid round," said the world number 39. "I played well today, only missed one green."

Li squeezed in the trip to his national open in between major commitments at the US Masters and the US PGA Championship this month and was rewarded by a massive gallery cheering his every move. "It feels great, I hope they enjoyed the golf today and thanks for their support," said Li.

SPOTLIGHT

McIlroy tweaks swing ahead of Quail Hollow return

AFP
Washington

Rory McIlroy has tweaked his swing after a lacklustre Masters, hoping a return to beloved Quail Hollow this week will set him up for major success at the PGA Championship.

The Northern Ireland star is among the favourites when the Wells Fargo Championship teed off last night on a Charlotte, North Carolina, course where he has won twice in course-record fashion, a final-round 62 in 2010 bringing his first US PGA triumph and a 61 in 2015's third round setting up a seven-shot win.

"It's always a place that I look forward to coming to every year," McIlroy said Wednesday. "The course is in great shape. I'm excited to be playing again after a couple weeks off. Got a busy stretch coming up and hopefully I'll start off with a good tournament this week."

McIlroy, who turns 30 tomorrow, shared 21st at the Masters last month at Augusta National, missing another chance at the career Grand Slam a green jacket would provide as Tiger Woods produced his first major win since 2008.

Using video of his Masters swing during a two-week layoff, McIlroy worked on his game with coach Michael Bannon and has made minor fixes he hopes produce major results in two weeks when the PGA Championship, an event he has won twice, is staged at Bethpage Black.

"One of the good things about having two weeks off is you have time to delve into a couple of things," McIlroy said. "Just sort of delved into that a little bit and worked on a couple mechanics and feel a bit better about it."

Four-time major winner McIlroy worked on curving the ball less and getting his body rotation in better sync.

His solid but unspectacular Masters ended a run of seven US PGA events this year where McIlroy had placed in the top 10, including a victory at the Players Championship and a runner-up effort at the WGC Mexico Championship.

McIlroy is as concerned about his mental game as his physical one. "If I look back through all the success I've had winning tournaments, whether it be a major or not, I always go back to the fact that I was in a really good place that week," McIlroy said. "What will help me ultimately win more majors is being in the right place mentally."



FOCUS

Ko seeks fourth LPGA win at beloved California course

AFP
San Francisco

Former world number one Lydia Ko of New Zealand returns to a golf course this week that has brought her success seeking to spark her game back to its glory days.

The Seoul-born 22-year-old defends her most recent LPGA title at the Mediheal Championship on the Lake Merced layout in Daly City, California.

Ko won last year's inaugural Mediheal event at Lake Merced in a playoff over Australia's Minjee Lee, but her victories on the course also include the 2014 and 2015 Swinging Skirts LPGA Classics, her first victory and defended title as an LPGA member after having achieved both in 2012 and 2013 at the Canadian Women's Open as an amateur.

"This is a place where I had my first win as a tour member. I even have a tattoo of the date here that I won," Ko said. "It's something that I'm going to remember a lot of. Just come back here and I always get good vibes. I love seeing familiar faces and seeing the volunteers and the members I've seen in the years that I've come. It's kind of I feel like they're family."

Ko's 2014 victory launched a season that saw her win two more titles, including the season-ending Tour Championship, and become the youngest-ever LPGA Rookie of the Year at age 17. In 2015, she won again at Lake Merced as the second of five tour triumphs that year, including her third Canadian Women's Open and her first major crown at the Evian Championship. "I just love coming back to places where I've played well," Ko said. "It just



gives me good vibes." She'll need them this week as part of a 144-player field that includes world number two Lee, coming off an LA Open triumph, and Thailand's fourth-ranked Ariya Jutanugarn. Ko won last year on the first playoff hole by hitting a 230-yard 3-wood over a tree to within three feet of the cup for an eagle to win her 15th, and most recent, LPGA crown.

"I knew that I needed to hit it absolutely perfect," she said. "It's hands down definitely the best 3-wood I've ever hit and top three of the best shots I've hit in my life, and I'm sure that will still be the case even at the end of my career."

Ko, ranked 17th, will play the first two rounds alongside American Jessica Korda and China's Feng Shanshan. Ko and Lee share the 72-hole course record at 12-under par 276.

HORSE RACING

Omaha Beach withdraws from Kentucky Derby

AFP
Washington

Betting favourite Omaha Beach has withdrawn from the 145th Kentucky Derby, trainer Richard Mandella said on Wednesday, after a medical exam discovered an entrapped epiglottis on the horse. The issue with the cartilage that covers the airway at the back of the colt's throat during swallowing was found after a cough prompted a medical examination.

That forced him to be scratched from tomorrow's lineup for the year's first US "Triple Crown" event at Churchill Downs. "After training this morning we noticed him cough a few times," Mandella said. "It caused us to scope him and we found an entrapped epiglottis. We can't fix it this week so we'll have to have a procedure done in a few days and probably be out of training for three weeks. We'll have to figure out a whole new game plan."

Mandella, a 68-year-old Hall of Fame trainer who has seen horses run in the Derby but never a winner, looked to have his best chance in years with Omaha Beach, the 4-1 favourite when he drew the 12th starting post for the 1.25-mile (2km) dirt classic for three-year-olds in Louisville, Kentucky.

Horses that drew post positions 13 through 20 will move one position closer

to the centre of the track with Omaha Beach withdrawing. Bodexpress, a 30-1 shot, will move into the field in place of Omaha Beach and break from post position 20, the far outside spot.

Revised odds issued Wednesday night taking into account Omaha Beach's absence made Game Winner, which had been second-favourite at 5-1, the new bookmakers' darling at 9-2, the horse trained by two-time Triple Crown-winner Bob Baffert and now set to start from post position 15.

Baffert led American Pharoah to the Triple Crown of Kentucky Derby, Preakness and Belmont Stakes in 2015 and followed it up with Justify last year. His other two entries remained the next-fancied horses in the field, both dropping from 6-1 to 5-1 odds - Improbable, starting from post five, and Roadster, launching from post 17.

"If Baffert ran as an entry, he'd be a 7-5 favourite to win his sixth Kentucky Derby," Churchill Downs oddsmaker Mike Battaglia said. Mandella has more than 1,750 victories as a trainer and Omaha Beach had wins over Baffert's beauties - downing Game Winner in the Rebel Stakes on March 16 and Improbable in the Arkansas Derby on April 13.

Omaha Beach was to have been ridden by Mike Smith, last year's Triple Crown jockey with Justify, and was coming into the Derby on a three-race win streak.



Trainer Richard Mandella poses with Omaha Beach after the horse was withdrawn from the 145th Kentucky Derby due to an entrapped epiglottis. (AFP)

CYCLING

Asselman wins Tour of Yorkshire opener

AFP
London

Anti-fracking protesters confronted Chris Froome's Team Ineos with screams of "sell out" ahead of the first stage of the Tour of Yorkshire yesterday before Dutch rider Jesper Asselman went on to claim the opener off a long-range escape.

The protest against riders representing Ineos, formerly known as Team Sky, came after environmental pressure group Friends of the Earth accused the company of trying to "greenwash" its reputation

because of its involvement in fracking and as a large-scale producer of plastic.

One protester shouted "sell out" and "Judas" as Ineos riders made their way to the race start in Doncaster.

The British squad became known as Team Ineos as of this week, after Ineos chairman Jim Ratcliffe, Britain's richest man, took over sponsorship of the outfit. On the rainswept course, the opening 182-kilometre leg of the race saw Roompot-Charles rider Asselman emerge victorious from a group of four riders who broke away from the main peloton.

The rebranded team of four-time Tour de France winner Froome and renowned

sprinter Mark Cavendish's Team Dimension Data did much of the chasing but could not overhaul the leaders.

Team Sky, then funded by the satellite broadcaster of the same name, won six Tour de France titles in seven years and eight Grand Tour victories in total. But they were mired in controversy over the way they used special medical exemptions to administer drugs that can enhance performance.

KING KUNG SURGES TO SOLO ROMANDIE STAGE WIN

A powerful solo burst from local talent Stefan Kung clinched victory on Stage 2

of the Tour of Romandie yesterday after a 174.4km rolling run in misty rain from the foothills of the Jura to the edge of Lake Geneva. When the 25-year-old time-trial specialist made his move, the peloton knew Kung had no chance of taking the overall lead.

A recent recruit of the French team FDJ, Kung launched his surge from a mini break with 18km to race. He produced a sustained tempo all the way to the line.

Some 59 seconds after Kung raised his arms in victory, Ireland's Sam Bennett of Bora edged Italy's Sonny Colbrelli for second as the peloton went through in a bunch sprint.

NBA

Blazers hold off Nuggets 97-90 to level playoff series

'I really liked our approach in the first half, particularly the first quarter. I thought we were a lot better offensively than in game one. We did a better job on the ball'

AFP
Los Angeles

CJ McCollum scored 20 points as the Portland Trail Blazers held off a late rally from the Denver Nuggets to score a series-leveling victory in their NBA Western Conference playoff duel on Wednesday.

McCollum led the scorers in a hard-fought 97-90 victory on the road at Denver's Pepsi Center to tie the best-of-seven series at 1-1. Portland talisman Damian Lillard had a relatively quiet night, restricted to just 14 points after shooting five-of-17 from the field.

However, double-digit contributions Enes Kanter, Zach Collins, Rodney Hood and Al-Farouq Aminu helped Portland get over the line. "I really liked our approach in the first half, particularly the first quarter," Blazers coach Terry Stotts said. "I thought we were a lot better offensively than in game one. We did a better job on the ball. I liked the tone we set for most of the game."

The Blazers looked to be cruising towards a comfortable victory after a dominant first half, surging into a 50-35 lead at the break. They opened up a 17-point lead early in the third quarter, and led by 14 heading into the final period.

That, however, was the cue for a sustained Denver assault, with the Nuggets slowly chipping away at the Portland lead.

A driving layup from Nikola Jokic put Denver within five points at 95-90 with 34 seconds left on the clock.

But a foul by Mason Plumlee gifted two free throws to Hood, who coolly drained both attempts to take the Blazers 97-90 clear with 17 seconds remaining. Jokic led the Denver scorers with 16 points while Jamal Murray added 15. Paul Millsap finished with 14 points.

Stotts meanwhile praised the defensive effort that restricted Jokic, but was unhappy that the Serbian managed to haul down 14 rebounds throughout the game. "I thought we pressured him a little bit more," Stotts said. "He didn't get the clean looks that we gave him in game one. He got too many offensive rebounds in the fourth though. We were very fortunate that we weren't hurt as badly as we could have been."

Game three in the series takes place in Portland on Friday. Nuggets coach Mike Malone



Portland Trail Blazers guard CJ McCollum (left) dribbles the ball up court against Denver Nuggets guard Gary Harris in the first quarter in game two of the second round of the 2019 NBA Playoffs at the Pepsi Center. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

said Denver had struggled to match Portland's physical approach in the first half.

"In that first half they were the aggressor, they were much more physical," Malone said.

"But I'm extremely proud of the way they came back in the second half. But we've got to do it for 48 minutes and that was the most disappointing thing about tonight - we brought it in the second half but in the first half it was not there."

Stotts meanwhile had raised eyebrows earlier, wearing a bowtie on the sidelines during the game. The Blazers coach revealed it was a tribute to video co-ordinator Jonathan Yim, who was injured in a car crash

with his family last week. "On Wednesdays, Jon would wear bowties to the game, so tonight was bowtie Wednesday," Stotts said. "I think bowties are undefeated this year."

GRIZZLIES SHOW INTEREST IN EUROLEAGUE COACH

Lithuania's Sarunas Jasikevicius, considered one of the EuroLeague's most promising head coaches, reportedly is drawing interest from the Memphis Grizzlies. ESPN cited league sources saying the Grizzlies soon plan to meet with Jasikevicius as they search for a candidate to replace fired coach JB Bickerstaff. League sources also said the coaching search

conducted by Zach Kleiman, the Grizzlies' executive vice president of basketball operations, is still in its early stages. Bickerstaff was promoted to interim head coach in November 2017, then given the job permanently in May 2018. The team went 15-48 under Bickerstaff in 2017-18 and 33-49 this season.

Jasikevicius, 43, known for his ability to help Lithuanian teams overachieve, interviewed for the head coaching position with the Toronto Raptors last year. He has coached the past three seasons with Zalgiris, which made a run to the EuroLeague Final Four in 2018 before losing in the quarter-finals this year. Following his team's elimination, Jasikevi-

cius expressed a strong desire to return next season, saying in a postgame news conference, "You will have to kick me out from here with two legs unless something miraculous happens."

Of course, a head coaching job in the NBA might qualify as "miraculous" for a former point guard who excelled in EuroLeague competition and also had a chance to compete with the Indiana Pacers (2005-07) and Golden State Warriors (2007).

In 138 NBA games, he averaged 6.8 points, 2.9 assists and 1.6 rebounds a game. An undrafted player out of Maryland, Jasikevicius played for the Terrapins from 1994-98.

MLB

Royals sweep Rays in blowout of Game 2

Reuters
Washington

The Kansas City Royals scored three runs in the bottom of the first inning and defeated the visiting Tampa Bay Rays 8-2 Wednesday in the second game of a doubleheader.

The Royals did the same three-run burst in the first game and held on for a 3-2 victory. It was the Royals' first doubleheader sweep since July 7, 2015, also against the Rays.

The Rays had won 11 of 12 games against the Royals coming into the day. Glenn Sparkman (1-1), who took the 26th roster spot because of the doubleheader, picked up his first major league win. He pitched seven shutout innings, scattering three hits, walking one and striking out six.

Reigning Cy Young Award winner Blake Snell (2-3) took the loss. He allowed seven runs on six hits in three-plus innings, as the Royals knocked him out in the fourth inning for the second straight game. He went 3 1/3 innings in a 10-2 loss on April 24.

The seven runs allowed Wednesday mark a major league worst for Snell. He had allowed six runs three times. The Royals got to Snell quickly.

Just like he did in the first game, Whit Merrifield led off the first inning with a double. He was balked to third and scored on Jorge Soler's two-out single. Kelvin Gutierrez then hit his first major league home run off the right field foul pole.

Gutierrez is the first Royals player to hit his first major league home run off a one-time Cy Young Award winner since Adalberto Mondesi did it against Justin Verlander on Aug 16, 2016.

The Royals scored another run off Snell in the third. Mondesi walked, then stole second and third. He scored on Soler's double down the left field line.

Snell did not record an out in the fourth. Cam Gallagher led off with a walk. Terrance Gore singled him to second, and both runners advanced on a passed ball. Billy Hamilton drove Gallagher home with a single, and Snell's day was done. Merrifield and Mondesi greeted reliever Wilmer Font with RBI hits.

Ji-Man Choi and Daniel Robertson homered in the ninth for

the Rays to avoid the shutout. **ALONSO'S WALK-OFF HIT GIVES WHITE SOX SPLIT WITH ORIOLES**

Yonder Alonso hit a walk-off, two-run single to lift the host Chicago White Sox to a 7-6 victory over the Baltimore Orioles on Wednesday night in the second game of a doubleheader.

Adam Engel had three hits, Jose Abreu amassed two hits and four RBIs, and Tim Anderson contributed two hits in the nightcap as the White Sox regrouped from a 5-4 loss in the opener to earn a split of the twin bill. Alonso was 0-for-8 in the doubleheader entering his ninth-inning at-bat against Miguel Castro.

RESULTS

Marlins	4-2	Indians
Royals	3-2	Rays
Royals	8-2	Rays
Orioles	5-4	White Sox
White Sox	7-6	Orioles
Red Sox	7-3	A's
Giants	2-1	Dodgers
Cubs	11-0	Mariners
Pirates	7-5	Rangers
D'backs	3-2	Yankees
Cardinals	5-1	Nationals
Phillies	7-3	Tigers
Reds	7-0	Mets
Braves	5-1	Padres
Rockies	11-4	Brewers
Twins	6-2	Astros
Angels	6-3	Blue Jays

With the bases loaded and two outs, he hit an opposite-field single to short left field, cementing a come-from-behind victory.

Baltimore's Dwight Smith Jr. had three hits and an RBI, and he executed an effective take-out slide to help the go-ahead run score in the seventh inning.

In the ninth, Leury Garcia drew a leadoff walk from Orioles reliever Evan Phillips, and Engel followed with a bunt single.

Paul Fry replaced Phillips got Yoan Moncada to ground out with the runners moving up a base.

Castro then entered and struck out Jose Rondon before intentionally walking Abreu to bring up Alonso.

The Orioles opened the scoring on a Smith RBI single in the first inning, but the White Sox answered with a run-scoring single from Engel in the second.



Kansas City Royals catcher Cam Gallagher (left) celebrates with relief pitcher Jake Newberry after defeating the Tampa Bay Rays in the second game of a doubleheader. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

NHL

Dallas Stars double up St. Louis Blues, even series

Reuters
Dallas

Mats Zuccarello, Tyler Seguin and Alexander Radulov each collected a pair of assists as the host Dallas Stars beat the St. Louis Blues 4-2 on Wednesday night and evened their Western Conference semi-final series at two wins apiece.

Four different players scored goals for Dallas, which got 27 saves from Ben Bishop.

Game 5 of the best-of-seven series will be Friday in St. Louis.

With his team trailing 1-0, Jason Dickinson put the Stars on the board with an on-the-spot tally at 11:23 of the first period. A point shot went wide, but Seguin whacked at the loose puck, and it came to a wide-open Dickinson to bury for his third goal of the playoffs.

Jason Spezza scored the go-ahead goal on the power play with 52 seconds remaining in the opening frame when he fired a rocket of a slap shot from the top of the right circle.

Blues goalie Jordan Binnington made

a series of big saves early in the second period, but his team's loose play finally proved costly when John Klingberg scored the eventual game-winning goal just before the midway point. After yet another St. Louis neutral-zone turnover, the Stars rushed up the ice, and Klingberg ripped a top-corner shot after taking a cross-ice pass from Seguin.

The hosts didn't let up, and rookie Roope Hintz made it a 4-1 affair late in the second period with his fifth goal of the playoffs. Hintz joined a three-on-two rush and finished a perfectly executed rush with his wrist shot.

Vladimir Tarasenko opened the scoring, putting the Blues ahead 1-0 five minutes into the clash, and Robert Thomas rounded out the offense by scoring his first NHL playoff goal with 6:16 left in the third period. Binnington stopped 27 shots for the Blues, who lost on the road for the first time in the playoffs.

Binnington also took a pair of penalties at the end of the second period, a roughing call against Jamie Benn and a slashing infraction on Bishop as they headed to their respective benches. The blood was boiling after David Perron earlier slashed

Bishop on the back as the Dallas goalie was behind his net playing the puck.

The Carolina Hurricanes moved to within one win of a series sweep over the New York Islanders on Wednesday, surging to a 5-2 victory in game three of their Stanley Cup playoff duel. Justin Williams scored a decisive goal in the third period to put Carolina 3-2 ahead before late efforts from Teuvo Teravainen and Sebastian Aho completed the scoring for the Canes.

The victory gives Carolina a commanding 3-0 lead in the best-of-seven series, leaving them with the opportunity to wrap up a clean sweep in game four before their home fans in Raleigh on Friday.

"We're up 3-0. They say the last one's the hardest, and it always is when the other team's backs are against the wall," Williams said. "We certainly don't want to go back (to New York), but if we have to we will. But we're going to work our tails off to hopefully get it done in four."

Islanders goalie Robin Lehner later rued a costly turnover in the third period which effectively set up Williams' go-ahead goal. "Coming into the third period at 2-2 I thought I was playing well," Lehner said afterwards. "I had a bunch of saves. But it

comes down to that play. It was a mistake. I own that one."

Hurricanes goalie Curtis McElhinney meanwhile made 28 saves in a history-making appearance for the home side.

McElhinney, who replaced the injured Petr Mrazek, became the oldest goalie in NHL history to start his first Stanley Cup playoff game. "I thought we did a great job," McElhinney, 35, said. "I think it was even a little tighter than the last game we played. It was a great effort and a huge third period for us again."

In Wednesday's other game, the Dallas Stars levelled their series with the St. Louis Blues at 2-2 after a 4-2 win at the American Airlines Center.

RESULTS
Carolina 5-2 Islanders
Dallas 4-2 St. Louis

Dallas Stars right wing Mats Zuccarello (left) and St. Louis Blues centre Robert Thomas fight for the puck during the first period in game four of the second round of the 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports



NBA

Dragic warns not to expect Doncic 2.0

'The only thing is I can tell them to work hard and to be patient'

By Ira Winderman
Sun Sentinel

It is math that has become part of the Miami Heat's off-season equation, math that Goran Dragic finds concerning.

In advance of the NBA draft lottery and Chicago combine, the NBA last week released a list of 233 players who declared for early entry.

There are, of course, only 60 selections over the two rounds of the June 20 NBA draft.

What caught Dragic's eye were the 58 international players to enter the process, many at the 19-year-old age minimum.

To a degree, Dragic said he could appreciate the heightened interest, considering the breakout success that Luka Doncic, the presumptive Rookie of the Year, had as a 19-year-old star with the Dallas Mavericks. Doncic, who played with Dragic on the European-championship Slovenian national team, was the No 3 pick in last year's draft.

Doncic, of course, also had been playing professionally in Spain for Real Madrid by age 16.

Dragic said for other international early-entry candidates to have similar impact expectations would be shortsighted.

"I hope not," the Heat point guard said, "because he's only one of the only guys who did it. He was playing at that level in EuroLeague, and he won EuroLeague MVP and he won the title.

"So it's not a lot of those young kids who have these kinds of big roles on a team and win everything."

Aware of the international game, Dragic, who turns 33 on Monday, is not expecting a Doncic 2.0.

"Luka is just one of those kids," he said. "And I don't see anybody right now, where he can say, 'OK, if Luka made it, I can make it.' Of course they can make it, but probably not to have the same at what he was."

The Heat, who are seeded 13th for the May 14 lottery in Chicago, likely will not be faced with much in the way of international intrigue.

The lone international prospect expected to fall into lottery range, if even that, is 6-foot-9 forward Sekou Doumbouya, who played this season for Limoges in France.

While the Heat gave up two picks to acquire Dragic from the Phoenix Suns in February 2015, including their unprotected 2021 selection, they generally have



Luka Doncic of the Dallas Mavericks drives past the US Team's Aaron Fox, of the Sacramento Kings, during the MTN Dew Ice Rising Stars game at Spectrum Center in Charlotte on February 15, 2019. (Charlotte Observer/TNS)

shied from overseas selections.

Just about all of the Heat's international selections over their 31 seasons have been made for other teams, in prearranged deals, including the 2011 second-round selection of current Indiana Pacers breakout forward Bojan Bogdanovic.

For his part, Dragic, who has

the right to opt out and become a free agent this summer, did not arrive to the NBA until he was 22, with plenty of growing pains early in his transition. He said he hopes this year's international early-entry class, which can withdraw from the process as late as June 10, heads previous cautionary tales. Last year, 43

international early-entry candidates withdrew from the draft.

"I just read somewhere that this year for the draft are a lot of players are coming in and only 60 get in," he said.

"So especially if you're coming from Europe, it's a little bit different. The only thing is I can tell them to work hard and to be

patient and when the opportunity comes, to take it. But not to rush it.

"I didn't rush it. I came into the NBA when I was 22. The first couple of seasons were struggles, were tough - different system, different language, different country. But I'm happy how my career has gone."

RUGBY

Defence coach Edwards to end Wales stint after World Cup

Reuters
London

Wales defence coach Shaun Edwards has decided not to sign a new contract and will leave the team after the World Cup in Japan this year, the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) said yesterday.

Edwards had last month reversed a decision to become head coach of English Super League club Wigan Warriors, with British media reporting that he would extend his stay with Wales after their successful Six Nations campaign this year.

The 52-year-old has helped Wales win three Six Nations Grand Slam crowns since joining as defence coach in 2008 and will be part of outgoing coach Warren Gatland's staff until the World Cup starting on Sept. 20.

"After more than 10 years with Wales this has been an incredibly difficult decision to reach but I won't be renewing my contract," Edwards said in a statement.

"I'd like to thank Warren and the WRU for the opportunity I have had working with

the national team."

"We won four Six Nations titles during my time with Wales, but I hope and believe that the best days are yet to come and I'm fully focused on seeing what we can achieve in Japan."

Gatland, who is also set to step down after the World Cup, was pleased that Edwards' future had been settled.

"Shaun has been an important part of the Wales set up over the past 11 years for what has been a hugely rewarding time for Welsh rugby," Gatland said.

"It's pleasing that we can draw a line under the speculation regarding Shaun's future with this announcement and we can look forward to preparing the squad for the RWC and the tournament itself."

Wayne Pivac, who will take over from Gatland, said: "When Shaun's availability post RWC became apparent we worked with him to offer him a new contract which he was happy with and for him to be part of the new look coaching team.

"Shaun has decided not to take that contract, which we must respect and we wish Shaun the best in what lies ahead for him post Wales."



Wales defence coach Shaun Edwards.

Clermont's Van der Merwe announces his retirement

Springbok Flip van der Merwe said yesterday he will retire after Clermont's Top 14 season ends.

"I'm going to stop at the end of the season, when your body tells you stop, you have to know how to listen to it and be honest," the lock, who turns 34 in June, said. Van der Merwe joined Clermont in 2015 and won the Top 14 with the club in 2017. He will play his 80th match for the club against Perpignan tomorrow. Clermont are second in the table and, with three rounds to go, are on course for a bye in the first round of the playoffs.

They are also in the European Challenge Cup final and face La Rochelle, in Newcastle on May 10. "We have to maintain the same level for the exciting end of the season ahead," said Van der Merwe, who is returning after a five-week ban for a high tackle. Before hanging up his boots "two trophies would be nice," he said. Van der Merwe played 37 times for South Africa and won a Super Rugby title with the Bulls, "but I finished my education here," he said yesterday. He said he hoped to stay in Clermont with his family.

FOCUS

NHL won't ban hits to head: Bettman

Reuters
New York

The NHL will not move to ban all hits to the head, commissioner Gary Bettman said Wednesday while testifying before a Canadian parliamentary subcommittee on concussions in sports.

Speaking with lawmakers in Ottawa, Bettman also denied that there is a clear link between head injuries and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a brain issue is widely viewed as a potential problem for football players. He added that the NFL and NHL should not be compared because hockey does not feature repetitive head contact.

Bettman testified that banning all head shots would be to the detriment of taller players whose checks might end up high on shorter players.

He added that the result would be the end of bodychecking, which fans like. According to the Ottawa Citizen, Liberal MP Darren Fisher told Bettman "the evidence is overwhelming" regarding the connection between brain injuries and CTE, but the NHL commissioner disagreed that it's an issue the league needs to address.



NHL commissioner Gary Bettman.

Bettman said, "I'm not a physician, I'm not a scientist. My views are formed by experts in the field. I don't believe, based

on everything I've been told, and if anybody has information to the contrary we'd be happy to hear it, other than some anecdotal

evidence, there hasn't been that conclusive link."

However, last November, the NHL paid a total of \$18.9 million

to 318 former players in an out-of-court settlement resolving a dispute over the league's failure to protect players from head injuries. Bettman also rejected a request that the NHL ban fighting. "It's penalised," Bettman replied. "The question you would have to ask is, 'What would be the consequence of that act (banning fighting)?"

"In a poll that they did four or five years ago with the players, 98 percent of the players polled, which I believe was roughly half the players, said they didn't want to see a change in the fighting rules."

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly also testified before the Canadian Parliament on Wednesday.

According to TSN, on Tuesday, Kelli Ewen, the widow of former NHL player Todd Ewen, sued the NHL in California, seeking damages related to brain trauma he incurred while in the league. Todd Ewen committed suicide in 2015 and was diagnosed posthumously with CTE.

Former NHL players Bob Probert, Derek Boogaard, Jeff Parker, Wade Belak, Larry Zeidel, Reggie Fleming, Rick Martin, Steve Montador and Zarley Zalapski all were diagnosed with CTE, TSN reported.

NFL

Raiders' Crowell tears Achilles; running back Lynch open to return

Reuters
New York

Oakland Raiders running back Isaiah Crowell suffered a torn Achilles tendon on Tuesday and is out for the season, ESPN's Adam Schefter reported on Wednesday.

Crowell, who signed a one-year contract valued up to \$2.5 million in late March, will have surgery next week, Schefter said. He became available when the New York Jets released him after signing free agent running back Le'Veon Bell to a four-year contract.

Meanwhile, NFL Network reports running back Marshawn Lynch is open to a return to the Raiders, if they're interested. ESPN reported last week that Lynch planned to retire for the second time in his career, after sitting out 2016 and returning for the last two seasons with Oakland, his hometown team.

Lynch, 33, had 90 carries for 376 yards and three scores

in six games in 2018 before his season ended with core muscle surgery.

It appears Oakland has already responded to Crowell's injury by signing someone else, as NFL Network reports the Raiders will re-sign free agent RB Doug Martin.

The Raiders had let Martin, their leading rusher last season, walk away with Crowell in the fold. Martin, 30, appeared in all 16 games (nine starts) in 2018 and had 839 yards from scrimmage and four touchdowns.

The Raiders were counting on Crowell to play a prominent role, alongside first-round rookie Josh Jacobs, who was taken 24th overall out of Alabama on Thursday. Their depth chart also includes Jalen Richard, DeAndre Washington and Chris Warren.

Crowell, 26, spent his first four seasons with Cleveland before signing with the Jets before the 2018 season. Last year, he gained 837 total yards and scored six touchdowns in 13 games (six starts).

SERIE A

Torino aim to honour past heroes in derby clash with Juventus

Torino have not won at Juve since 1995 with their only win since then at home in 2015

AFP
Milan

Torino are pushing for a first-ever qualification for the Champions League as they face local rivals Juventus on the eve of the 70th anniversary of the air disaster that wiped out their all-conquering team of the 1940s.

Eighteen Torino players and officials were among 31 people killed in the accident on May 4, 1949, when their plane crashed into the Superga hill near Turin. The 'Grande Torino' team, returning from a match against Benfica in Lisbon, had won the Serie A title five seasons in a row but won it just once after the crash, in 1976. Juve meanwhile have racked up 35 titles and recently secured their eighth in a row.

Now they are closing in on the Champions League after a fine season that culminated last weekend with their first win over AC Milan since 2001, which put them just three points from the top four. "We mustn't think about the Champions League, what we need to do is to keep cool and keep our feet on the ground," said Torino president Urbano Cairo after the win.

"In this final rush it is very important to be consistent. We now have to think about next Friday and an extremely important game against Juventus. The race for Europe is still wide open, but I saw a very determined Torino."

Torino have not won at Juventus since 1995 with their only win since then against their city rivals at home in April 2015. Juventus have already wrapped up the title but their hopes of equalling their points record of 102 from the 2014 season were ended after last weekend's 1-1 draw against Inter Milan. But they can still achieve a century if they win their remaining four games, with Portuguese star Cristiano Ronaldo targeting the top Serie A scorer crown, with 20 league goals so far, three behind Sampdoria's Fabio Quagliarella.

Torino captain Andrea Belotti is back to his goalscoring best, with six goals in eight games and 13 for the season, in-



Torino's players celebrate after their first win over AC Milan since 2001 in the Italian Serie A at the Grande Torino Stadium in Turin last week. (AFP)

cluding the opener against AC Milan. Should they make the top four it would be their first appearance in Europe's top club competition since 1976-77, when they were knocked out of the old European Cup in the second round.

Behind Juventus and second-placed Napoli, who host Cagliari on Sunday, the battle for elite European football remains tight with six teams in the running. Juventus could play a role in who goes through to next season's Cham-

pions League as after Torino they play Roma the following weekend and Atalanta on May 19.

Atalanta, are fourth, with 59 points from 34 games, one point ahead of Roma, who are fifth. The side from Bergamo are on a nine-game unbeaten run in Serie A and head to Lazio on Sunday ahead of the Coppa Italia final in the Stadio Olimpico on May 15.

Inter Milan, on 62 points, are three points ahead of Atalanta, and can con-

solidate third place at struggling Udinese. Roma, meanwhile, travel to Genoa looking to extend their unbeaten run to six games and return to the Champions League places.

Gennaro Gattuso's Milan host Bologna on Monday having slipped out of the European berths into seventh, with just five points from their last seven games. AC Milan are on level with Torino on 56 points with Lazio still in the running in eighth on 55.

FIXTURES (ALL TIMES GMT)

Today: Juventus v Torino (1830)

Tomorrow: Chievo v SPAL (1600), Udinese v Inter Milan (1830)

On Sunday: Empoli v Fiorentina (1030), Lazio v Atalanta; Parma v Sampdoria, Sassuolo v Frosinone (all 1300), Genoa v AS Roma (1600), Napoli v Cagliari (1830)

On Monday: AC Milan v Bologna (1830)

LA LIGA

Getafe, Sevilla and Valencia eye Champions League riches



Sevilla host Leganes today hoping to make up for their shock 1-0 defeat at Girona. (Reuters)

Reuters
Sevilla

With Barcelona already crowned champions, the focus in Spain has shifted to a thrilling three-way battle for La Liga's final Champions League berth, with Getafe, Sevilla and Valencia eyeing game-changing prize money worth at least 30mn euros (\$34mn).

With three games to go, little-known Getafe have 55 points along with Sevilla but cling on to the coveted fourth spot due to their superior head-to-head record, while Valencia are sixth on 52 but have the best head-to-head record of the trio.

Sevilla host Leganes today hoping to make up for their shock 1-0 defeat at Girona when they became the first team to lose away to the Catalans in six months, while on Sunday Getafe host Girona after a frustrating 2-1 surrender at Real Sociedad.

Valencia, who endured a chastening last-gasp defeat at home to Eibar last weekend, visit bottom club Huesca on Sunday but could be feeling the effects of their Europa League semi-final first leg away to Arsenal.

UEFA's revenue distribution model means La Liga clubs can receive at least 30mn euros from a combination of appearance money, bonuses and the television pool in the Champions League even if they go out in the group stage. Clubs can earn an additional 2.7mn for every game they win, while getting into the knockout phase would see them coin another 9.5mn, in addition to increased matchday revenues.

Valencia have reached the Champions League final twice, in 2000 and 2001, and returning to Europe's premier competition would boost their plans to finish building their new stadium, which will require an extra 150mn euros.

Sevilla, who earned 48mn euros for reaching the quarter-finals last season, routinely sack

coaches who fail to take the team into the Champions League, and they ousted Pablo Machin in March when their top-four hopes were looking bleak.

The money would have the biggest impact at Getafe, however, who have only existed in their current form since 1983 and play in a stadium holding only 17,000 spectators, which would look grossly out of place in the Champions League. The Madrid outfit, who returned to the top flight two years ago, have the fourth-lowest budget in La Liga and qualifying for Europe's top competition for the first time would cover two-thirds of their annual wage bill, estimated at 47.5mn.

Elsewhere in Spain, Barca visit Celta Vigo and will be expected to rest players in preparation for their Champions League semi-final second leg at Liverpool, while second-placed Atletico Madrid visit Espanyol. Real Madrid, who slumped to an embarrassing 10th league loss of the campaign last week at lowly Rayo Vallecano, host Villarreal.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Ozil says he will not be leaving Arsenal

The Guardian
London

Mesut Ozil has insisted he will remain an Arsenal player next season. The 30-year-old is the highest-paid player in the history of the club but has been dropped several times this season.

The Arsenal head coach, Unai Emery, has not been afraid to omit Ozil from his squad for big games and it remains to be seen if the former Germany international starts Europa League semi-final first-leg match with Valencia at the Emirates Stadium. Ozil has often come in for criticism from large sections of Arsenal's fanbase, having joined from Real Madrid in 2013. He signed a new deal last season which ties him to the Gunners until 2021 and, despite some suggestions he could be sold in the summer, he told Sky Sports he intends to stay put.

"Yes absolutely," he replied when asked if he will be at Arsenal next season. "I have



two years left on my contract. I don't know about after that but yes, absolutely. I'm 30 now and I've still got two years in front of me and what happens after that I don't know

myself"

One player who will not be a teammate of Ozil next season is Aaron Ramsey. The midfielder has agreed to join Juventus on a free transfer when his contract expires this summer and has played his last game for Arsenal having been ruled out for the rest of the campaign with a hamstring injury.

Ramsey confirmed the diagnosis had ended his decade-long career with the Gunners in an emotional Instagram post. "It saddens me to say that the game against Napoli was my last game in an Arsenal shirt," he wrote. "Unfortunately it left me with an injury that rules me out of the remaining games. I am really disappointed not to play until the end and give everything for the club while I am still an Arsenal player. Unfortunately it's out of my hands but I wanted to say thank you to the fans for your support."

"We'll miss him," added Ozil. "He's a player with a lot of potential and ability. As a player we have to accept it but I wish him well for the future and I wish him all the best."

ROUND-UP

Japan double delight at Asia championships

Borussia Dortmund coach Lucien Favre will remain in his job next season regardless of whether or not Dortmund win the Bundesliga title this month, the club's sporting director Michael Zorc has said. "We will definitely go into the new season with Lucien Favre, whether we win the league or not," Zorc told Kicker magazine yesterday.

Dortmund are two points behind Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga title race with three games to go, having held a nine-point lead over their rivals back in December. After recent humiliating defeats to both Bayern and local rivals Schalke, many had questioned whether Favre had what it took to lead Dortmund to their first title since 2012. Yet Zorc insisted that Favre had the full backing of the club, and even said he

was confident that the Swiss coach would extend his current contract beyond 2020. "We have a very good relationship of trust, and we will hold contract talks," said the Dortmund sporting director.

The club hierarchy rebuked Favre after he declared the title race over following defeat to Schalke last weekend. "We will never give up hope and we will fight to the end, that is part of our DNA," Dortmund players' director Sebastian Kehl said.

Dortmund face a tough trip to Werder Bremen tomorrow, before playing Fortuna Dusseldorf and Borussia Moenchengladbach in their last two games. League leaders Bayern, meanwhile, host bottom club Hanover tomorrow, before clashes with top four sides RB Leipzig and Eintracht Frankfurt.

LEEDS STRIKER BAMFORD BANNED FOR REFEREE 'DECEPTION'

Leeds United forward Patrick Bamford has received an immediate two-match ban after being found guilty of a charge of "successful deception of a match official", the Football Association announced.

Bamford will miss Sunday's clash at Ipswich and the first leg of the Championship play-off semi-final as fallen giants Leeds look to return to the Premier League.

The striker was suspended after clenching his face in a melee involving several players during last weekend's draw with Aston Villa. Anwar El Ghazi was sent off as a result, but there was no contact made and the Villa forward's red card was rescinded.

In a statement, the FA said Bamford denied the charge.

FOCUS

Pochettino open to change in concussion rules

AFP
London

Mauricio Pochettino said he was open to a change in football's concussion protocols as Tottenham Hotspur wait for an update on the health of defender Jan Vertonghen, who suffered a head injury against Ajax.

Vertonghen saw a neurologist yesterday after a clash of heads with teammate Toby Alderweireld during Tottenham's Champions League defeat by Ajax this week. The 32-year-old Belgium international had to be helped from the pitch during Tuesday's 1-0 semi-final, first-leg defeat after initially being allowed to play on following lengthy treatment.

Tottenham issued a statement on their website on Wednesday saying Vertonghen had undergone further assessment and tests had been clear. But the north London club's handling of the injury has been criticised and Spurs boss Pochettino said he was prepared to accept changes in protocols for head injuries.

"Today was his appointment with the specialist and we still haven't seen the report," he said. "After the game was good, he was more relaxed and felt better. Now we need to see the report from the specialist. We don't know (if he can face Bournemouth), we need to wait. That is going to be a decision from the medical staff. We cannot guess now. We hope it is not a big issue and he is available soon."

The Argentinian added: "Always in that situation I am open, more than open, to improve the decisions. I think the most important thing was going to be the health of the player. It is not important, the game, the semi-final of the Champions League, the score, the priority is the player. I don't know if we need to change the rules, if we need another doctor."

Brain injury charity Headway called for authorities to introduce "temporary concussion substitutions" to allow medical staff to make proper assessments of injured players. Tottenham's participation in next season's Champions League will be guaranteed if they beat Bournemouth in their penultimate Premier League game of the season. Spurs, Chelsea, Arsenal and Manchester United have all dropped points in recent weeks and all four remain in contention to finish in the top four behind Manchester City and Liverpool.

AMIR CUP

Sadd, Duhail scrape through to semis

Bounedjah scores the winner against Gharafa, Duhail beat a stubborn Al Shahania

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Al Sadd and Al Duhail were made to sweat hard before the two Qatari giants sealed their place in the Amir Cup semi-finals yesterday. QNB Stars League champions Sadd were cruising 3-0 in their quarter-finals but Al Gharafa made it interesting with two quick goals. Baghdad Bounedjah, however, put the game to bed in the 90th minute with his second goal of the match as Sadd won 4-2 at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium.

Earlier, defending champions Duhail beat a stubborn Al Shahania 2-0. It was a far from convincing performance from Duhail as they were frustrated in the first half. Shahania also missed a penalty with Duhail goalkeeper Amin Lecomte diving to his left to save Mostafa Jafri's low shot.

And Yousef El Arabi made them pay for it as he scored Duhail's opener in the 59th minute, though Nakajima Shoya should get all the plaudits for the goal. Shoya exchanged passes with Almoze Ali as the Japanese midfielder found himself with just the goalkeeper to beat. But Shoya unselfishly passed the ball to unmarked El Arabi, who just had to tap it into an open goal.

While Shahania pressed for the equaliser they came close when Luciano Vasquez's free kick was cleared by Lecomte. In the quick counter, Edmilson scored Duhail's second in the 79th minute with Shahania's players' spirits broken after that. Moroccan Mehdi Benatia played a through ball to Edmilson, who took forever to strike the ball. But when he did, Edmilson found the net with a powerful right-footer as Amer Ahmad looked on helplessly.

In the semi-finals, Duhail will take on the winner of today's quarter-final between Al Ahli and Al Saliya. Duhail coach Rui Faria was satisfied with his player's performance, despite them not being at their best. "It was important for us to achieve this victory and move on to the semi-finals. Now we can start preparing for the AFC Champions League," he said.

"Today we changed our style of play so it took some time for the players to click. But the end result is all that matters and happy we have reached the semis," Faria added.

The Portuguese manager praised Shahania for putting up a good fight. "Shahania are a good team. They are well organised and have a good coach, who made

defensive plans to repel our attacks and relied on counter-attacks. We could not control the match well. It was difficult in the first half. In the second half we controlled the match and were effective in the midfield, which enabled us to score," he said.

Faria accepted his team has much to improve and vowed to make them better. "I do not make any excuses and football is a game that does not accept excuses. When I came to Al Duhail, the players were different. The team is still moving forward and we have to make more efforts until the team reaches the level we want. This process takes time and it cannot happen overnight.

"We have lost the league but now we have to plan for the future and I hope that we can achieve what we want and I cannot promise anything but to work with the players and prepare well for future matches," Faria said.

Meanwhile, Sadd were in cruise control as they led 2-0 before Gharafa gave them a scare. Boualem Khoukhi put Sadd ahead heading an Akram Afif cross. Gharafa were quick to respond with some counter attacks but Ahmed Alaaeldin and Mehdi Taremi failed to find the target.

And Sadd seized on a wasteful Gharafa, when prolific striker Bounedjah scored with a delightful chip after Hassan al-Haydous found him with a through ball. Taremi and Amro Seraj brought Gharafa back into the contest in the second half. But Bounedjah scored the winner in added time, tapping Afif's cross into an empty net as the duo celebrated the win with a cheeky dance. Sadd will wait for the winner of the match between Al Arabi and Al Rayyan, who will lock horns in the quarter-finals today.



Al Sadd's Baghdad Bounedjah scores against Al Gharafa in the Amir Cup quarter-finals at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium yesterday. **PICTURE:** Noushad Thekkayil **BOTTOM:** Al Duhail players celebrate after their win over Al Shahania.



SPOTLIGHT

Xavi to retire at end of season

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Al Sadd captain Xavi Hernandez will retire at the end of the season to move into coaching, calling time on a trophy-laden career spanning two decades.

Former Barcelona and Spain midfielder won eight La Liga titles and four Champions League trophies while at Barcelona. The 39-year-old also won his first title in Qatar after Al Sadd SC won the QNB Stars League title this season. Xavi, who has made a record 767 appearances for Barca and 133 for Spain, confirmed his retirement plans in an open letter sent to members of the Spanish media yesterday.

"This is my last season as a player but I am looking forward to seeing what the future holds for me as a coach," wrote Xavi, who has been playing for Al Sadd since leaving Barca in 2015.

Xavi played in Al Sadd's Amir Cup quarter-final win over Al Gharafa yesterday. And he said that he wants to finish his career by winning the Amir Cup and Asian Champions League with Sadd. "It has been a privilege to play football until 39 years of age and now I would like to finish the season on a high by winning the Amir Cup and by getting to the

next phase of the Asian Champions League."

Xavi made his debut for Barca in 1998 after coming through the club's famed La Masia academy and soon became the heartbeat of the team's midfield, winning eight La Liga titles and four Champions League crowns before joining Al Sadd. He was one of the key players when Spain won their first and only World Cup in 2010 as well as their European Championship triumphs in 2008 and 2012, eventually retiring from the national team after a disappointing 2014 World Cup.

Xavi will continue his work with Generation Amazing, a Qatari programme created "to ensure the 2022 World Cup leaves a human and social legacy". "During the next few weeks, I will tie my boots to play the last matches of an unforgettable race that has lasted for 21 years and has taken me all over the world," Xavi said.

"My philosophy as a coach reflects the style we developed for many years under the influence of Johan Cruyff and La Masia, and that has its greatest exponent in the way of playing football in Barcelona. I love seeing the teams take the initiative in the field, attack football and return to the essence of what we all love from our childhood days: possession football," he added.



Al Sadd captain Xavi and Assim Madibo (right) celebrate during their Amir Cup quarter-finals win over Al Gharafa.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Klopp hails Messi after Barca star stuns Liverpool

AFP
Barcelona

Jürgen Klopp admitted Lionel Messi was "unstoppable" on Wednesday night after he left Liverpool needing a miracle to reach the Champions League final. Luis Suarez poked in against his former club before Messi hit a late double, the second a stunning free-kick for his 600th Barca goal, as his team took a 3-0 lead from a pulsating semi-final first leg ahead of next week's return at Anfield.

"He's unstoppable," said Klopp afterwards. "Obviously we couldn't defend the free-kick. What a strike. He's a world-class player but I knew that already. It's no surprise."

Klopp could only smile after Messi's curling shot nestled in the top corner but this result was harsh on his side. They matched Barcelona in the first half, dominated them early in the second and could still have left with an away goal after Messi's brilliant brace, only for Mohamed Salah to hit the post.

"I said to the boys I was proud of how we played against a side like this," Klopp said. "If you lose away it's not a massive problem as long as you score a goal. That's our problem tonight - it doesn't make our life any easier."

Messi and Suarez did what they have done all season, their tallies now at 47 and 27 goals respectively in all competitions. It had been a breathtaking contest befitting two of Europe's most exhilarating teams.

The first half was electric, a reel of chances, breaks and blocks, while the second was tense, a tactical battle where Barca dared Liverpool to over-exert.

The comeback will be even tougher for them given Barcelona, with La Liga wrapped up, will surely rest a host of players against Celta Vigo this weekend while Liverpool, a point behind Premier League leaders Manchester City, will have to be at full throttle again away at Newcastle tomorrow. "They can still



Barcelona's Lionel Messi (right) celebrates after scoring against Liverpool in the Champions League semi-final first leg in Barcelona on Wednesday night. (Reuters)

make us suffer," said Barca coach Ernesto Valverde. "The result is good but the tie is open."

Messi was already fresh, after playing just over half the La Liga minutes he could have done in April, and he looked sharp early on, weaving through the centre while for Liverpool, the sensational Sadio Mane raced down the left.

The attacks were scintillating but the defending was good too. Andy Robertson scrambled across to block Messi's finish from six yards and moments later it was Sergi Roberto on the slide,

preventing Mane from sprinting clear. Messi wanted a penalty when the ball jumped up on Joel Matip and Naby Keita went off injured in the 25th minute, replaced by Jordan Henderson.

A minute later came the goal. Arturo Vidal sprayed the ball left to Philippe Coutinho, who cushioned back for Jordi Alba. Alba shaped to cross but instead curved a perfectly weighted pass to the near post, where Suarez nipped in.

Liverpool came again. Mane scampered in behind then flicked the ball round Sergio Busquets. He should have

scored too, Henderson's cross finding him free from eight yards but the shot flew over. Barca took control just as Suarez began to lose it, irked by James Milner barging Messi into the sideboards after the Argentinian had danced past Robertson.

But Liverpool were re-energised at the start of the second half. Marc-Andre ter Stegen pushed away shots from Milner and Salah, and held a Milner drive. Then Messi intervened, striking twice in seven minutes. His own run started the first, setting Sergi free to square to

Suarez. Off balance, Suarez could only knee the ball against the crossbar but it came back for Messi, who chested and finished into an open net.

Two was tough on Liverpool but Messi was not done. The free-kick was central, 30 yards out.

He whipped it over the wall and into the top corner. Barca were delirious but Liverpool almost grabbed an away goal when a clearance on the line fell kindly for Salah, who hammered against the post. It could have been a lifeline. Liverpool are on the brink.

Not over yet, warns Messi

Barcelona: Lionel Messi warned his Barcelona teammates that their place in the Champions League final is still not certain despite his two-goal salvo in a 3-0 semi-final first leg win over Liverpool. "It would have been better to win 4-0 than 3-0 but it is a very good result," said the Argentine star. "It's not definitive, we are going to go into a very complicated atmosphere, with a great history."

Messi's second goal was the 600th of his Barca career and he reached the landmark in stunning style, majestically curling a free-kick into the top corner. "It was beautiful when it went in but I was lucky that the ball lodged up there in the corner," Messi refused to take all the plaudits for the win which also Luis Suarez score against his former club. "We must be more united than ever, all together: the team, the fans. We said at the beginning of the season that we will win it together."

He defended Philippe Coutinho, by gesturing to the fans not to whistle as he was substituted and then admonishing them during a frank post-match interview. "It's ugly to say goodbye to a player like that," Messi said. "We said at the beginning of the year that we are going to achieve this together and it is not a moment to criticise anyone but to support, to push forward and to do this all together."

Barca coach Ernesto Valverde was keen to point out that Barca threw away a three-goal cushion against Roma in the quarter-finals last season but, avoid a repeat at Anfield, and his team are within touching distance of a treble.