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CRICKET

Babar and Shadab excel as Pakistan beat Lanka again

Skipper Upul Tharanga became the first Lankan and 11th batsmen in one-day history to carry his bat through a complete innings

AFP
Abu Dhabi

Babar Azam scored a successive hundred while Shadab Khan gave his career best bowling and batting performance to help Pakistan thump Sri Lanka by 32 runs in the second day-night international in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

One-drop batsman Babar knocked a fighting 133-ball 103 while Shadab scored a career best 52 not out to lift Pakistan from a struggling 79-5 before Shadab the bowler returned with his best figures of 3-47 to dismiss Sri Lanka for 187 all out in 48 overs.

The 23-year-old Babar and Shadab, who turned 19 earlier this month, were engaged in a match-turning 109-run seventh wicket stand which helped Pakistan reach 291-9 on a sluggish Sheikh Zayed Stadium.

The victory gives Pakistan a 2-0 lead in the five-match series while this becomes Sri Lanka's ninth defeat in a row.

Skipper Upul Tharanga became the first Sri Lankan and 11th batsmen in one-day history to carry his bat through a complete innings with a fighting 144-ball 112 not out with 14 boundaries – his 15th ODI century.

It were bowlers who helped Pakistan defend a low total despite Tharanga and Jeffrey Vandarsay (22) put up a fighting 76-run eighth wicket stand, but it wasn't enough.

Dropped twice on 13 and then on 20, Tharanga stood alone as Sri Lanka needed 51 off the last five overs but the last two batsmen were run out and he was left stranded.

It were bowlers who helped Pakistan defend a low target.

Once paceman Junaid Khan

removed Niroshan Dickwella for three in the third over, spinners Shadab, Shoaib Malik (1-17) and Mohammad Hafeez (1-24) rocked the Sri Lankan batting with regular wickets.

Earlier, Azam followed up his 103 which anchored Pakistan's 83-run win in the first game in Dubai on Friday, once again anchoring the innings.

Pakistan, who won the toss and batted, found the going tough as they lost half the side at the end of 20 overs for just 79, but Azam and Shadab led the fightback.

Azam brought up his seventh one-day hundred off 130 balls – his fourth this year – with a sharp double in the 49th over.

Shadab, who scored 14 not out in his only previous innings, played a support role during which he hit just one boundary off 68 balls.

Sri Lankan new-ball bowlers Lahiru Gamage (4-57) and Suranga Lakmal (1-42) made early inroads with three wickets inside first power-play of ten overs.

Gamage had Fakhar Zaman dismissed for 11 and Mohammad Hafeez for eight while Lakmal dismissed out-of-form Ahmed Shehzad for eight.

Medium pacer Thisara Perera (2-34) then struck twice, removing Shoaib Malik (11) and Sarfraz Ahmed (five) to leave Pakistan in a spot of bother.

Azam added 22 for the sixth wicket with Imad Wasim (ten) before his stand with Shadab gave Pakistan's total some respectability.

The remaining matches will be played in Abu Dhabi (October 18) and Sharjah (October 20 and 23). The two teams will also play three Twenty20 internationals, the first two in Abu Dhabi (October 26 and 27) and the last in Lahore (October 29).



Pakistan's Shadab Khan (L) and Babar Azam run between the wicket during the second one day international (ODI) between against Sri Lanka in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

SPOTLIGHT

Aussie batsman Khawaja criticises selection policy



Reuters
Sydney

Australia batsman **Usman Khawaja** has criticised the country's selection policy and says the constant team changes hampered his attempts to develop his all-round game.

The 30-year-old left-hander scored 55 runs in four innings during Australia's 3-0 Test series defeat in Sri Lanka in 2016 before being dropped for the third Test.

He then scored half-centuries in six consecutive home Tests but did not play in the four-Test series in India this year.

Khawaja was brought back for the first Test in Bangladesh, only to be dropped for the second match of the series. "They never used to do it before, I'm not really sure why they do it now," Khawaja told ABC Radio of the selection policy.

"It creates a lot of instability in the team I reckon, going in and out for everyone.

"You hear things like 'the players are playing afraid' or whatnot, but that's what happens when you drop players all the time. We've been doing that a fair bit lately."

The Pakistan-born cricketer has played 24 Tests since making his debut in the 2011 Ashes series against

England and has scored five hundreds, averaging over 45.

The Queensland captain is in good form in domestic cricket and is expected to earn a place in Australia's top order in the Ashes series against England which starts next month.

"For some reason it seems like lately in Australia that the best players always seem to be the next guy in, which I don't totally agree with," he said.

"(It is) very hard to develop your game and play some consistent cricket if you're not getting consistent opportunities overseas, which I haven't been getting.

"It's frustrating but I've just got to focus on what's in front of me. I'd love to win an Ashes series – it's something I haven't been able to do yet."

Khawaja believes the Australian selectors already know what side to pick for the five-test series against England starting in Brisbane on Nov. 23.

"I think the Australian team is pretty stable," he said. "I'm confident the selectors already know what their make-up of the team is going to be for the first Test.

"There might be a few positions up for grabs depending on what happens in the Shield games but I'm pretty confident they know what they're expecting."

SCORECARD

Pakistan

Fakhar Zaman c Mendis b Gamage..... 11
Ahmed Shehzad c Siriwardana b Lakmal 8
Babar Azam c Mendis b Gamage..... 101
Mohamed Hafeez c Dickwella b Gamage..... 8
Shoaib Malik c Dickwella b Perera..... 11
Sarfraz Ahmed b Perera..... 5
Imad Wasim lbw b Vandersay..... 10
Shadab Khan not out..... 52
Hasan Ali run out..... 7
Rumman Raees c Dananjaya b Gamage 0
Junaid Khan not out..... 0

Extras: (lb3, w3)..... 6

Total: (for nine wkts; 50 overs)..... 219
Fall of wickets: 1-17 (Zaman), 2-27 (Shehzad), 3-40 (Hafeez), 4-71 (Malik), 5-79 (Ahmed), 6-101 (Wasim), 7-210 (Azam), 8-218 (Hasan), 9-218 (Raees)

Bowling: Lakmal 10-0-42-1 (2w), Gamage 10-0-57-4 (1w), Vandersay 9-0-44-1, Perera 10-0-34-2, Dananjaya 9-0-30-0, Siriwardana 2-0-9-0

Sri Lanka

N. Dickwella lbw b Junaid..... 3
U. Tharanga not out..... t 112

K. Mendis c Shehzad b Hasan..... 10
L. Thirimanne lbw b Malik..... 12
D. Chandimal b Shadab..... 2
M. Siriwardana c Babar b Shadab..... 3
Thisara Perera c Babar b Hafeez..... 7
A. Dananjaya b Shadab..... 1
J. Vandersay c Shahzad b Raees..... 22
S. Lakmal run out..... 1
L. Gamage run out..... 3

Extras: (lb6, w5)..... 11

Total: (all out; 48 overs)..... 187
Fall of wickets: 1-10 (Dickwella), 2-30 (Mendis), 3-70 (Thirimanne), 4-79 (Chan-

dimal), 5-83 (Siriwardana), 6-92 (Perera), 7-93 (Dananjaya), 8-169 (Vandersay), 9-172 (Lakmal)

Bowling: Junaid 6-0-21-1, Raees 8-1-37-1, Hasan 10-2-32-1 (2w), Wasim 1-0-3-0, Hafeez 10-0-24-1 (2w), Malik 4-0-17-1, Shadab 9-0-47-3 (1w)

Result: Pakistan won by 32 runs

Toss: Pakistan

Umpires: Richard Kettleborough (ENG) and Shozab Raza (PAK)

TV umpire: Sundaram Ravi (IND)

ICC match referee: Andy Pycroft (ZIM)

BOTTOMLINE

Sri Lanka to go ahead with tour of Pakistan

AFP
Colombo

Sri Lanka's cricket authority said yesterday it will go ahead with its tour of Pakistan later this month for the third and final Twenty20 match despite security concerns expressed by several players.

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) said its executive committee agreed unanimously that the October 29 match in

Lahore should go ahead as scheduled following reassurances of the best possible security.

The board said it "confirmed its commitment to play the third T20" in Lahore following assessments made by both Sri Lankan and Pakistan government authorities, independent security experts and the International Cricket Council.

"Accordingly, the selection committee of the SLC will finalise a squad of 22 by Tuesday and announce the

final 15 on Friday," the SLC said in a statement.

SLC chief Thilanga Sumathipala will accompany the team to Lahore, the statement added.

The October 29 match will be the first played in Pakistan by Sri Lanka – or any other top international team – since militants ambushed its team bus en route to the Lahore stadium in 2009, wounding at least seven players.

Doubts over whether the match

would take place were raised over the weekend when some players expressed concerns for their safety and the board said it would review security reports, making a final determination on Monday.

Lahore will host the T20 series finale following several matches played in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where Pakistan have played their "home" internationals since the ambush. Since 2009, the only international team to visit Pakistan is Zim-

babwe, who played five limited-overs games in Lahore in 2015.

But after Pakistan successfully staged the final of its domestic Pakistan Super League tournament in Lahore under heavy security this March, the country hoped international games could once again resume.

A successful series against a World XI team featuring top foreign players in Lahore last month further boosted calls for cricket to return to the militancy-racked nation.

Sri Lanka Cricket chief Sumathipala in August appealed for an end to Pakistan's isolation – a statement welcomed by Pakistani cricket officials – and urged countries to come to play.

He recalled that several Test nations did not want to visit Sri Lanka at the height of the Tamil separatist conflict, when bombs were exploding in the capital in the mid-1990s, but Pakistan and India had toured Sri Lanka at the time.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

I didn't think for one minute about joining Arsenal: Sterling

'I signed for City for five years. I have three and a half years left'



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola (left) watches as midfielder Raheem Sterling speaks at a press conference in Manchester yesterday. (AFP)

By Jamie Jackson
London

Manchester City midfielder Raheem Sterling has stated he did not “think one minute” about Arsenal’s wish to buy him in the summer when he learned of the club’s interest. The forward was wanted by Arsenal as part of a deal that would have taken Alexis Sanchez to Manchester City. However Pep Guardiola did not contemplate allowing the 22-year-old to leave and Sterling has rewarded the manager’s faith by scoring six times in the Premier League and seven in all competitions.

Sterling said he did not discuss with Guardiola a potential move to Arsenal, after discovering the club’s interest when with England in August. “I didn’t need to speak to him because I already spoke to

him in the summer,” Sterling said.

“I didn’t have any negative thoughts. I just woke up one day with England, didn’t believe a word of it. I didn’t need to worry about it – didn’t think about it one minute.”

Sterling signed from Liverpool in July 2015 and views his long-term future at City. “I signed for five years,” he said. “I have three and a half years left.”

Sterling is City’s joint top-scorer, with Sergio Agüero and Gabriel Jesus. His other goal came in the 2-0 victory over Shakhtar Donetsk in City’s second Champions League match.

City host Napoli today and Sterling wants to continue his stellar form with the World Cup in Russia at the close of the campaign. “Yeah, it is massive year for me, for the team and I need to keep building, keep working hard and go to the World Cup on a positive,” Sterling said.

His highest club tally of goals in a season is 11, achieved twice with Liverpool. Sterling appears certain to eclipse this, having managed 10 last term. “I just need to continue focusing on getting into goalscoring areas, getting into the box because that is where the majority of my goals come from,” he said. “I am trying to build on the year before.”

Sterling praised Guardiola’s contribution to his game. “He’s been massive for me especially with basic stuff – he always tries to get you to do the simple things at top level and that’s the genius thing about him. It works, too.”

Sterling’s six league goals have come at the best strike-to-minutes ratio in the Premier League. “It is something I have been trying to improve, scoring more goals, being more efficient and being more clinical,” he said. “That has been a massive question mark.”

Whereas City have won both group games, Napoli lost their opening match at Shakhtar. However Maurizio Sarri’s side are unbeaten in Serie A which they lead by two points. Of the challenge that awaits his side, Guardiola said: “It is not a team that is going to wait. They make high pressing and amazing buildup in the middle. They have three guys who are so dynamic: [Lorenzo] Insigne, [Dries] Mertens and [José] Callejón. They make runs in behind – especially Callejón. In the middle they have [Marek] Hamsik who can also run in behind.

“The set pieces are also good. The goalkeeper (Pepe Reina) is also good; the leader of his team-mates, he has the quality to make the buildup.”

Guardiola has a fully-fit Aguero available, following a rib injury. “Yesterday he had an amazing training session,” the manager said.

Guardiola insists his love for Napoli is genuine

Manchester: Ever since Manchester City were drawn in Champions League Group F with Napoli, the club’s Spanish manager Pep Guardiola has been effusive in his praise of the Serie A leaders and their coach Maurizio Sarri.

The teams clash at the Etihad Stadium today in a game Guardiola believes could be a feast of attacking football. But his recent words, including the suggestion that the Italians are among the top three sides in Europe, led Napoli’s outspoken president Aurelio De Laurentiis to suggest there may be mind games at work.

Guardiola laughed off those remarks and insisted he was a genuine admirer of Sarri and his team. “I heard from president of Napoli in *Gazzetta (dello Sport)* that my words are just to distract Napoli but it is just what I believe,” the Spaniard told reporters yesterday.

“I believe they are a really good team in all senses but if the president prefers to hear they are a disaster then I can say that as well,” he said with a grin. “Maybe you don’t believe me. If I say good things about Napoli it is because I truly believe what I’m saying. I don’t need to compliment them. They are a great team,” he said. “They are very good when they play with the ball. They can build actions really well, they are able to push forward and do so many things well. Tomorrow when we are on the pitch we will both try to attack, both teams will want to keep the ball and score as many as possible. I think when you have two teams that want to play in this way you get a really interesting match,” he added.

Napoli have made a perfect start to the Serie A season, winning all eight games and scoring 26 goals with a style of play that is more expansive and attacking than is traditional for Italian teams. “They do many, many things and the things they do they do perfectly,” Guardiola said.

“It is not a team that is going to wait. They make high pressing and to amazing build up in the middle. They have three guys who are so dynamic, (Lorenzo) Insigne, (Dries) Mertens and (Jose Maria) Callejón. In the middle they have (Marek) Hamsik who can also

run in behind,” he said.

Guardiola said he had first noticed Sarri during his spell at previous club Empoli and said he could be viewed as an innovator in a similar fashion to former AC Milan coach Arrigo Sacchi. “I like to watch football and I like to watch Napoli when I am sat in my home,” Guardiola said.

“I love many, many things about a Sarri team. Tuesday is a big test. For me it is fascinating to have a challenge. Hopefully those who watch it will enjoy it”.

Guardiola also said there is no chance that his Manchester City players will fall into the trap of over-confidence against Napoli despite their swaggering Premier League form. City demolished Stoke City 7-2 on Saturday to move two points clear at the top of the table and are attracting rave reviews for the quality of their attacking football, with 37 goals in 11 games in all competitions so far.

They face a stern test at home against free-scoring Serie A leaders Napoli, who have had an even better start to their league campaign with eight straight wins, compared to City’s seven wins and one draw.

Guardiola said over-confidence would not be a problem for his side. “If they think (like) that they will be stupid,” he said. “But that is not going to happen. I am going to show to my players on Monday, Tuesday how good a game they (Napoli) are going to play. I will show them, like I showed them Shakhtar Donetsk, how good they are. They are quite similar to Shakhtar in terms of the way they play but the difference is where Shakhtar maybe wait a little bit, they kill you with the high pressing. I am very happy to have the opportunity to play this kind of game.”

City, who ended last season empty-handed, have improved in all areas of the pitch, with their twinkle-toed attack allied to a stronger defence. However, centre-back John Stones said he was disappointed that City let in two goals against Stoke, despite their crushing win.

“We conceded two goals, which is frustrating from my point of view,” said Stones.

“We will go away and work on that but I think it’s been a great run of defensive play from all of us and I think we showed that.”

SPOTLIGHT

Salah fuelled by Egypt exploits

AFP
London

Fuelled by the adrenaline rush of clinching Egypt’s first World Cup berth in 28 years, Mohamed Salah has set his sights on rescuing Liverpool’s spluttering Champions League campaign. After drawing their opening two Champions League matches, Liverpool have no margin for error when they face Maribor in Slovenia today.

Fortunately for under pressure Reds boss Jurgen Klopp, in Salah they have the man for the big occasion. Salah was the key figure as Egypt enjoyed a dramatic 2-1 win against Congo last week that booked their return to the World Cup for the first time since 1990.

The 25-year-old sparked wild scenes of celebration across Egypt when he converted the decisive penalty five minutes into stoppage-time. The Liverpool winger had given Egypt the lead on the hour with a cool finish, but Congo almost spoiled the party when Arnold Bouka equalised two minutes from full time. Mahmoud Hassan was brought down in the area with just seconds left and Salah stepped up to score the penalty that clinched their place in Russia next year. Salah became an instant national hero and has already had a school from his hometown of Basyoun renamed in his honour.

“That was to me a dream come true, whether as a footballer or an Egyptian citizen and fan. I’m proud I made the Egyptians happy,” Salah said of the epic victory. “When I stepped up to take the penalty, I didn’t think of anything but scoring and winning the game. The most difficult moment in my life was when the fans fell silent following Congo’s equaliser but thank God we finally realised a childhood dream of my own.”

Salah’s heroics for Egypt maintained his impressive revival since being sold by Chelsea in 2016 and now he is focused on sparking more jubilant scenes – this time on Merseyside. Since joining Liverpool for a then club record £39mn from Roma in June, Salah has quickly won over the doubters with six goals in 12 appearances.

That fine form is a far cry from his time at Chelsea, where he scored just twice in 19 appearances before being sold by then boss Jose Mourinho. Mourinho felt Salah’s slender



Mohamed Salah was the key figure as Egypt enjoyed a dramatic 2-1 win against Congo last week that booked their return to the World Cup for the first time since 1990. (AFP)

frame was ill suited to the frenetic Premier League and twice loaned him out to Fiorentina and Roma.

But Salah was reborn after making a permanent move to Rome. Thriving in a league where obdurate defending has been turned into an art form was a huge boost to Salah’s confidence and that, combined with his growing maturity off the pitch, convinced Klopp to bring him to Anfield.

Klopp isn’t the only one dazzled by Salah’s potent combination of poise and pace, with Arsenal and France legend Thierry Henry claiming he has the potential to be one of the

world’s best. “I don’t think it’s about proving anything to Mourinho, but proving to the Liverpool fans that you are this guy, that you can be a player like (Philippe) Coutinho,” Henry said recently.

“For me, he is special, he has something special. He will be a special player for Liverpool. I like the fact that he is direct. We don’t have a lot of players like that in the game anymore. And yes, people will say sometimes that he needs four opportunities to score a goal. When he is able to finish all the opportunities he has then he will be more than lethal for this club.”

FOCUS

Napoli’s ‘Mr 33’ takes roundabout route to top

Reuters
Milan

Barcelona, Bayern Munich and Manchester City are the only clubs Pep Guardiola has coached during his illustrious managerial career. Napoli’s Maurizio Sarri, his opposite number in today’s Champions League match against City, has taken a more roundabout route to the top with Sangiovanese, Arezzo, Avellino, Perugia, Grosseto, Alessandria and Sorrento among clubs on his CV.

Sarri, who coaches arguably the most entertaining team in Serie A, never played football professionally and did not make his touchline debut in Italy’s top flight until the age of 55 after winning promotion with Empoli in 2014. Known as “Mr 33”, because he reputedly thought up 33 different plans for set pieces at Empoli, Sarri quickly innovated at Napoli by using a drone to film training sessions from above. In just over two seasons, he has swept away the inconsistency which marked predecessor Rafael Benitez’s spell at the club and brought out the best in players such as midfielders Marek Hamsik and Jorginho, who had struggled for form under the Spaniard.

Argentina forward Gonzalo Higuain was another who flourished under Sarri, scoring a Serie A record of 36 goals in the 2015-16 season before being loaned to Juventus. “Sarri has been like a father,” Higuain said at the time.

“He emphasises my weak points; he immediately told me what he thought of me, both the good and the bad. But he has shown me all his faith. I appreciate the fact that he is an honest man who likes to see us play good football.”

Napoli finished second in Sarri’s first season in charge, in 2015-16, and could have won the title last season had it not been for a poor run of results just before Christmas. They finished third boasting the best scoring record with 94 goals.

Napoli have made a flying start this season, winning their first eight league games and scoring 26 goals in the process, suggesting they could end Juventus’ run of six successive titles. Sarri began coaching amateur teams in the 1990s, combining his hobby with a banking career that took him to the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland and Luxembourg. But, after leading Sansovino to the fourth tier at the start of the millennium, he de-



Napoli coach Maurizio Sarri never played football professionally and did not make his touchline debut in Italy’s top flight until the age of 55 after winning promotion with Empoli in 2014. (AFP)

cided it was time to make the leap. “I understood that if I dedicated myself solely to coaching, I could get much better at it,” he said. “It wasn’t easy, but my family supported me.”

He has since worked his way up from the lower tiers of Italian football. He led Sangiovanese to the third tier in 2004 and reached Serie B when he was appointed by Pescara the following season. After coaching 16 clubs in just over 20 years, he made his big breakthrough by leading Empoli to Serie A in 2013-14.

Former Napoli hero Diego Maradona is among those who thought that his move to the club was a bridge too far. “Sarri is a good person, but he’s not worthy of Napoli,” he said shortly after Sarri’s appointment.

“They needed a coach who understands the size and prestige of the club.” Four months later, the Argentina World Cup winner had changed his tune. “I was wrong about Sarri,” he said. “I ask for forgiveness.”

SPOTLIGHT

Kane's Champions League rise faces Real acid test

What Kane does is score goals. He's a complete player: Real coach Zinedine Zidane

AFP
Madrid

Harry Kane is an admitted follower of Cristiano Ronaldo's stratospheric stats as he pursues the Portuguese's status as the best in the world, but for once it is Ronaldo who trails in the race to be the Champions League's top marksman.

An inspired Kane has transformed Tottenham Hotspur's European form from last season's failure to a flying start with five of Spurs' six goals in victories over Borussia Dortmund and APOEL Nicosia. The acid test for Kane and his teammates comes at the Santiago Bernabeu tonight where holders Real Madrid and Ronaldo lie in wait having dismissed Dortmund and APOEL themselves thanks to four goals from the reigning world player of the year.

"For sure it is a chance to measure ourselves. We are facing the best team in the world," Spurs boss Mauricio Pochettino said. "We are a young team with many internationals, but not so much experience of playing these type of games. It is a fundamental test."

Pochettino has fallen head over heels for Kane, conceding his wife was jealous of his repeated declarations of "love" for the English international. "He is one of the most in-form strikers in the world for sure. The numbers speak for themselves," added Pochettino.

The figures are so good they've drawn comparisons with the two men that have taken goalscoring to previously unseen levels in the past decade — Ronaldo and Lionel Messi. Kane's 13-goal haul in September matched the best ever goalscoring month by Messi or Ronaldo. "I want to be one of the best players in the world, so when people put stuff up and I see I am close to those players it is a great incentive to get even closer and go to the next step," Kane said after netting his sixth hat-trick of the season to slay APOEL in Cyprus.

At just 24, Kane has time on his side but far more to prove not only to reach the heights set by Ronaldo and Messi, but also the consistency they have shown in sharing the last nine Ballon d'Or awards.

"Staying consistent at the top level is what it's all about," added Kane. Comparisons with Ronaldo have been derived not only from Kane's goalscoring, but his drive to constantly improve. "He is a great professional who is always



An inspired Harry Kane (right) has transformed Tottenham Hotspur's European form from last season's failure to a flying start with five of Spurs' six goals in victories over Borussia Dortmund and APOEL Nicosia.

looking to get better," added Pochettino. "In the next 10 years he is going to be among the best strikers in the world because he has that determination on top of his quality."

Despite Spurs' rise in recent seasons under Pochettino, consistency has been a shortcoming that has so far starved them of silverware. Spurs fans proudly declare Kane as "one of their own," but doubts remain over how long he will persist with Pochettino's project if trophies aren't forthcoming.

Tottenham know very well how tempting the lure of Real's riches and prestige can be having lost Luka Modric and Gareth Bale to the Bernabeu in re-

cent years. And with Real having failed to replace the departed Alvaro Morata with Kylian Mbappe, who instead headed to Paris Saint-Germain in August, Kane has emerged as a prime target.

"I don't know what will be of Kane's future, but I can talk about the here and now," Real coach Zinedine Zidane said yesterday, refusing to quash speculation. "He's a fundamental player for Spurs. He's very good at everything, but what he does is score goals. He's not a static player, he always finds space and is quick. He's a complete player."

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FIXTURES (all 1845 GMT unless stated):

PLAYING TODAY

Group E

At Maribor, Slovenia: Maribor (SLO) v Liverpool (ENG); At Moscow: Spartak Moscow (RUS) v Sevilla (ESP)

Group F

At Manchester, England: Manchester City (ENG) v Napoli (ITA); At Rotterdam, Netherlands: Feyenoord (NED) v Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR)

Group G

At Monaco: Monaco (FRA) v Besiktas (TUR); At Leipzig, Germany: RB Leipzig (GER) v Porto (POR)

Group H

At Madrid: Real Madrid (ESP) v Tottenham Hotspur (ENG); At Nicosia: APOEL Nicosia (CYP) v Borussia Dortmund (GER)

PLAYING TOMORROW

Group A

At Lisbon: Benfica (POR) v Manchester United (ENG); At Moscow: CSKA Moscow (RUS) v Basel (SUI)

Group B

At Brussels: Anderlecht (BEL) v Paris Saint-Germain (FRA); At Munich, Germany: Bayern Munich (GER) v Celtic (SCO)

Group C

At Baku: Qarabag (AZE) v Atletico Madrid (ESP) (1600); At London: Chelsea (ENG) v Roma (ITA)

Group D

At Barcelona, Spain: Barcelona (ESP) v Olympiakos (GRE); At Turin, Italy: Juventus (ITA) v Sporting Lisbon (POR)

FLAT TRACK BULLY

Lukaku 'relaxed' over record against 'Big Six'

AFP
Liverpool

Manchester United striker **Romelu Lukaku** has brushed off criticism over his poor record against the Premier League's "Big Six" after a missed chance against Liverpool cost his side a potential win. The Belgium international has scored 15 goals in 57 matches against Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City, Manchester United and Tottenham.

It is a poor return considering the form he has shown over the past two years for Everton and now United and was highlighted again after he missed his solitary opportunity in Saturday's goalless draw at Anfield, shooting too close to international teammate Simon Mignolet. It was a chance the 24-year-old would normally have converted after plundering 16 goals in 13 appearances for club and country and led to more questions about his big-game performances. "I don't think too much about it — I just move on," said the striker, many of whose goals have come late in matches, which

critics point to as evidence he does not score enough game-changing goals.

"I know expectations are really high but that is something I relish," said the forward, who joined United from Everton in the summer. "When I was at Everton we have a different mindset going into games. Sometimes it was difficult against some teams when you play not to win and you don't really create chances.

"Now I am in a team who want to win against big teams so I think the situation will change. I don't put pressure on myself. The biggest pressure for me came in the European Super Cup against Real Madrid (in August) as that was the game when everyone was looking at me thinking, 'Will he do it?' That game (in which he scored in a 2-1 defeat) freed me from everything."

Lukaku said his performances were scrutinised carefully but he was unruffled. "A lot of strikers miss bigger chances than me but with me it is always, 'Rom did this, Rom did that,'" he said. "That is the standard I've set myself. It is something that happens in football and I am relaxed about it."



ROUND-UP

Indonesian keeper dies after mid-game collision

AFP
Jakarta

Indonesian football was in mourning yesterday after celebrated goalkeeper **Choirul Huda** died following an on-pitch collision with a teammate. Huda, 38, a long-time regular for his hometown club Persela in East Java, collapsed just before half-time after Sunday's accidental clash with Brazilian midfielder Ramon Rodrigues.

Video footage showed the father of two clutching his chest in pain before he was rushed away on a stretcher and taken to hospital. Doctors said he stopped breathing and suffered a heart attack. "He received an emergency treatment for a few minutes in the hospital but he could not be saved. He died before 5:00pm yesterday," Persela's assistant coach Yuhronur Efendi said.

Doctors said the medical team tried to revive the veteran Huda, a former fringe player in the national set-up, for about an hour. "Choirul Huda suffered from traumatic collision with a teammate which caused him to stop breathing and have cardiac arrest," Yudistiro Andri Nugroho, a doctor from Lamongan hospital, said in a statement.

Nugroho said Huda suffered possible neck and head trauma from the impact to his chest and lower jaw after he dived at the feet of on-rushing players and was caught by the legs of Rodrigues. Persela paid tribute to Huda, who played for the team more than 500 times since 1999, calling him "The Real Legend" of the club in a posting on Twitter.

Thousands of fans also took to social media in memory of Huda, who had been known to Persela supporters as "One Man, One Club, One Love".

NIGERIA WARNED ABOUT WORLD CUP PAY STRIKE

Nigeria coach Gernot Rohr has warned his players that their performances at next year's World Cup will be affected if there is any repeat of protests over pay and bonuses. At the last finals in Brazil three years ago, the Super Eagles deliberately missed a training session in protest at the non-payment of a bonus for qualifying.

That forced the country's then sports minister to charter a private jet and fly to South America with nearly \$4mn in cash. Rohr said he is convinced that



Nigeria can go beyond the last 16 for the first time by preparing well in advance.

Nigeria were not the only team to be hit by money troubles in 2014: Ghana's players demanded that more than \$3mn in bonuses was flown to Brazil. The revelation was a major embarrassment for the government at the time, which was battling spiralling inflation and the decrease in value of the country's currency. Nigeria's women's team, the Super Falcons, last December staged a protest march to parliament to demand payment of bonuses for winning the African Women Cup of Nations. That followed a two-week sit-in at their Abuja hotel.

The government later agreed to release more than \$1mn. The Nigerian men's team is in line for a \$12.5mn bonus from football's world governing body FIFA for qualifying for the finals in Russia. All 37 players used in qualifying are entitled to a share. Squad members at the finals stand to earn more if they match or better the national side's performances in 1994 and 2014 by reaching the knock-out stages.

LOSERS EGYPT BACK IN 2018 CHAN

Egypt will compete at the 2018 African Nations Championship (CHAN) in Morocco, despite being eliminated in the qualifying competition two months ago. The Egyptians lost 4-2 on aggregate to Morocco, who are now automatic competitors in the 16-team event having replaced Kenya as hosts.

This opened the door for Egypt to be reinstated into the biennial tournament restricted to home-based footballers. African football body CAF ditched Kenya as hosts last month for falling behind with preparations and Morocco were chosen to replace them at the weekend.

FOCUS

Ashley puts Newcastle up for sale

AFP
London

Newcastle United owner Mike Ashley is ready to end his controversial reign after putting the Premier League club up for sale yesterday. Ashley has been a polarising figure at Newcastle since taking over at St James' Park in 2007 and the sports retail tycoon has decided now is the time to step down. Newcastle have been relegated from the Premier League twice in the Ashley era, with the 53-year-old angering Magpies fans with his failed managerial appointments and his decision to sell naming rights to the club's historic stadium.

Ashley has frustrated current Newcastle boss Rafael Benitez by failing to back the Spaniard in the transfer market. Benitez has publicly complained about Newcastle's spending on several occasions since leading them to promotion from the Championship last season, with Ashley responding that he doesn't have the cash to compete with superpowers like Manchester City, Chelsea and Manchester United.

Now Ashley, who paid £134mn for Newcastle, reportedly hopes to find a new owner by the end of the year following the formal announcement of his sale plan.

"As one of the Premier League's oldest and best supported football clubs — and for the benefit of its many fans and supporters — Newcastle United requires a clear direction and a path to a bright and successful future," a Newcastle statement read. "To give the club the best possible opportunity of securing the positioning and investment necessary to take it to the next level, at what is an important time in its history, its present ownership has determined that it is in the best interests of Newcastle United and its fans for the club to be put up for sale."

Speculation over Newcastle's future was ramped up after the appearance of financier Amanda Staveley at their match against Liverpool earlier this month. After initially trying to win over Newcastle fans by sitting with them at away matches — the Londoner was often pictured in a Newcastle shirt with supporters — he spent far less time at the north-east club once the atmosphere soured in recent years.

Italy seeded for World Cup play-off draw

Paris: Italy will be one of the four seeded teams in the draw for the European play-offs for next year's World Cup after FIFA released their latest world rankings yesterday. Switzerland, Croatia and Denmark will be the other seeded teams for the two-legged ties which will be played next month thanks to their positions in the rankings.

The unseeded sides for the draw, which will take place today, will be Northern Ireland, Sweden, the Republic of Ireland and Greece. FIFA will also use these latest rankings to determine the top-seeded nations when the draw for the World Cup group phase is made on December 1 in Moscow. That means that, along with hosts Russia, the top seeds will be holders and number-one ranked Germany, Brazil, Portugal, Argentina, Belgium, Poland and France. Leading nations to miss out on a top seeding include Spain, England and Uruguay.

Spain and Peru, who will go into a play-off against New Zealand for a place in Russia, both climb into the top 10 in the latest rankings. Russia though slipped one place to 65th in the rankings, further diminishing expectations of their chances on home soil next year.

FIFA RANKING TOP 20

1. Germany; 2. Brazil; 3. Portugal; 4. Argentina; 5. Belgium; 6. Poland; 7. France (+1); 8. Spain (+3); 9. Chile; 10. Peru (+2); 11. Switzerland (-4); 12. England (+3); 13. Colombia (-3); 14. Wales (-1); 15. Italy (+2); 16. Mexico (-2); 17. Uruguay (-1); 18. Croatia; 19. Denmark (+7); 20. Netherlands (+9)
Selected others
23. Northern Ireland (-3); 25. Sweden (-2); 26. Republic of Ireland (+8); 47. Greece; 65. Russia (-1)



SERIE A

Inter in title chase, Milan in freefall

Icardi fires Inter to a dramatic 3-2 victory in the Derby della Madonnina

AFP
Milan

Mauro Icardi's heroics proved Inter Milan are ready to reclaim the Serie A title for the first time since 2010, club president Massimo Moratti insisted yesterday, as AC Milan were left in crisis. Captain Icardi fired Inter to a dramatic 3-2 victory in the Derby della Madonnina, which moved them 10 points clear of city rivals AC Milan and just two behind leaders Napoli, with champions Juventus in third after losing at home for the first time in two years.

"Yesterday (Sunday) I felt more like a fan than ever before. The game was fascinating and beating Milan is always special," Moratti said. "It's the clash that the people of Milan feel most, regardless of the table. They (leaders Napoli) are very good, but at the same time, Inter started off quietly and gave me the impression of being more of a team. They can overcome Napoli and go for the Scudetto."

The derby between the two former European superpowers was not only about city rivalry but also one of Chinese owners – Zhang Jindong, whose Suning Group bankrolls Inter Milan and Li Yonghong's Rossoneri Sport Investment Lux Group, which owns AC Milan.

AC Milan have been completely overhauled at a cost of 230 million euros (\$270 million) by Li, who already paid 740 million euros to buy the club last April. Zhang's Suning group paid nearly 270 million euro for Inter Milan in June 2016.

Both teams have won 18 Serie A titles – second only to the 33 won by Juventus – with Milan last winning in 2011 while Inter's last championship was the previous season in 2010, when Jose Mourinho led the club to the Champions League, the Italian Cup and Serie A. Inter's seventh win of the season under Luciano Spalletti was enough to paint the city of Milan black and blue. "To win these matches has a wonderful taste," said Spalletti. "We've stockpiled a lot of points now which will help for the future and we want to push for as many points as possible."

And he heaped praise on Icardi after his hat-trick heroics. "Mauro was great. He was fundamental, he helped the team as he went to recover the ball, lessening the burden on his teammates. Then, he made no mistakes in attacking space in the box or with his finishing. He's a strong player, he's complete for his age and he takes on



Inter Milan's captain Mauro Icardi shows his jersey to supporters as he celebrates with teammates after winning the Serie A match against AC Milan at the San Siro Stadium in Milan on Sunday night. (AFP)

great responsibility."

Inter next go head to head with Napoli who maintained their perfect run of eight wins in win over Roma. "We'll go there to play but Napoli are a great side and (Maurizio) Sarri is doing a brilliant job."

AC Milan dropped to tenth place – 12 points behind leaders Napoli and ten adrift of second-placed Inter – after their fourth defeat piled the pressure on coach Vincenzo Montella. "Looking at the table

right now, everything might seem out of reach, but the season is very long and we can make up ground," insisted Montella.

AC Milan chief Marco Fassone backed Montella despite a third straight defeat. "Vincenzo is staying with us. When you change this much, as we did, you need time," said Fassone. "AC Milan should not be in that position and we have to climb back," insisted Fassone, appointed managing director after Li's Rossoneri Sport

Investment bought the club from former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. "We are starting to see the first positive signs, but Montella will still have time to continue his work," continued Fassone. Things will change eventually," Mario Bilotelli, now at Nice but previously at both clubs in Milan, urged AC to make a bid for Icardi. "He's a true 'bomber'! Maybe Milan will wake up and buy him!" said the Nice player on Instagram.

FOCUS

Uzbek football president visits Aspire Academy

The President of Uzbekistan Football Federation (UFF), Umid Ahmadjonov, visited Aspire Academy yesterday morning with a delegation including UFF's Secretary-General Sador Rakhmatullaev.

The delegation was welcomed by senior officials from Aspire Academy, including Director General, Ivan Bravo, and Deputy Director General, Ali Salem Afifa.

As part of their visit, the UFF delegation received a tour of Aspire Academy, met with a variety of Academy staff and were shown the Academy's state-of-the-art facilities.

The tour was designed to illustrate how the Academy's facilities, mission and vision helps identify talented young athletes in Qatar and beyond with real potential and transform them into world-renowned champions who can represent Qatar in national teams across a wide range of sports, as well as promote a sports culture in Qatar and the region.

Following their tour Bravo,

discussed areas of potential collaboration with the UFF officials with focus on developing best football practices. At the end of their visit, the Academy's Director General and the UFF's President exchanged commemorative shields.

Commenting on his visit to the Academy, Ahmadjonov, said: "It was a pleasure to visit such a great sporting academy. I must congratulate the people of Qatar for having such a fabulous institution that promotes such amazing values and does so much for aspirational athletes. I am pretty sure that the country's sporting future is in safe hands and that Qatar will have a highly competitive national football team in time for the 2022 FIFA World Cup here in Doha based on the vision of this great academy."

Ahmadjonov was elected in September to the leadership of the UFF. He is also the Vice President of Uzbekistan National Olympic and Paralympic Committee and the former Vice-President of Pakhtakor Tashkent Football Club.



Director General of Aspire Academy Ivan Bravo (right) presents a shield to Umid Ahmadjonov, the President of Uzbekistan Football Federation, yesterday.

Qatar U-19 to play friendlies ahead of AFC qualifiers



Qatar under-19 football team will play three friendly matches against Iran, Uzbekistan and India. The dates for the matches are October 18th, 21st and 28th. Qatar coach Bruno Miguel announced the squad yesterday as the team continued its training at the Aspire grounds, after resting for two days following the Slovenian camp. Meanwhile, Qatar Football Association has received an official letter from the Asian Football Confederation stating that the Afghanistan team withdrawal from the AFC U-19 Championship qualifiers to be held in Doha from November 4 to 8. The group now consists include Qatar, Iraq and Lebanon.

SPOTLIGHT

Doubts over Postecoglou future grows

Reuters
Melbourne

Speculation over Ange Postecoglou's future is set to follow Australia into next month's World Cup playoff against Honduras after the country's football boss shed little light on the matter yesterday. Local media reported last week that Postecoglou would step down after the two-leg playoff, regardless of whether Australia win it and qualify for the finals in Rus-

sia next year. Postecoglou, who is contracted to the end of the World Cup, passed up the chance to deny the report, saying only that he was focused on the Honduras games in a statement issued by Football Federation Australia (FFA). FFA chief executive David Gallop had little to add when pushed by reporters in Sydney on Monday but poured cold water on suggestions in the media that the 52-year-old might be replaced before the Honduras games to give the team certainty.

"We are focused on Honduras, those are massive games for us both away and (at

home)," said Gallop. "(Postecoglou's) focus is on November and knuckling down to the task which is to qualify for our fourth consecutive World Cup."

A successful former coach in Australia's domestic top flight, Postecoglou has spoken openly about his ambitions to return to coaching at club level and pursue a role overseas. *News Ltd* media reported yesterday that Chinese Super League club Shanghai Shenhua was preparing to table an offer worth \$3mn a year to Postecoglou to replace Gus Poyet, who quit last month.

OPINION

England won't win WC, must improve: Shearer

Reuters
Mumbai

England's age-group teams might have dazzled on the global stage in various youth tournaments in 2017 but the senior side is not yet of a standard to be a serious title contender at next year's World Cup, former striker Alan Shearer said.

Gareth Southgate's side went unbeaten in their qualifying campaign for Russia but has been criticised for lacking a creative spark after scoring only 18 goals in 10 games in a group containing lowly-ranked Lithuania and Malta. "I don't expect us to win the World Cup in Russia next year, even with the success of our teams underneath that level, be it the under-21s, the under-19s or the under-17s," Shearer said in an interview from Bengaluru. "I don't see us going to Russia and winning the tournament. No."

England's recent record at the quadrennial showpiece event has not been inspiring with the 1966 champions, who reached the quarter-finals in 2002 and 2006, exiting at the round of 16 stage in the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

Their worst performance came at the last edition in Brazil when they failed to get past the group stage, while the Euro 2016 exit at the round of 16 stage after defeat to Iceland left little optimism among England's supporters.

Shearer, who was in India for a Premier League fan park event where roughly 40,000 spectators watched the top matches of the weekend on a giant screen, thinks that will prove to be a nadir. "What I would expect is to see an improvement on what we saw in France in the European Championships 18 months ago," said Shearer, who scored 30 goals in 63 appearances for England.

"It shouldn't be too difficult to improve on that when you consider the performance we had in the game against Iceland when we were knocked out of the tournament. Very much similar to other campaigns when we had results in the qualifiers. We are there now but we have to go one step further and we have to show improvement."

In stark contrast to the national side, the England Under-20s won the World Cup in South Korea in June before their Under-19 team became



European champions in Georgia the following month. The young Lions have also won the Toulon Tournament this year and are through to the last 16 of the ongoing Under-17 World Cup in India.

Shearer, who scored twice in four appearances at the 1998 World Cup finals in France, felt one of the reasons why England were unsuccessful at the top level was because young English players are not playing in the Premier League.

"Part of the problem is lot of these boys in the league teams with England are not getting the chance to play at the club level," Shearer said. "Clubs like Man City, United, Chelsea and Arsenal tend to spend big on foreign players who the managers or the clubs feel are pretty much guaranteed for success. It's difficult for these managers as they have to deliver success tomorrow. To put in a young player, he needs time to settle and feel his way into the Premier League and clubs are not prepared to do that."

Shearer has, however, backed former teammate Southgate to succeed as the national team manager. "I am pleased that we were able to give an English player, an young English coach the opportunity to try and do it at that level," Shearer said. "More often than not over the past years we have gone and spent big on foreign managers and they haven't proved successful at all. I am pleased we have given the job to an English guy who has played in tournaments, I have played with Gareth in tournaments also, so he is aware what tournament football is about and what you need to try and do to get to the latter stages. Hopefully that will stand him in good stead."

PREVIEW

WARRIORS FACE NEW-LOOK RIVALS IN QUEST TO REPEAT

‘The biggest challenge is complacency. We’ve been to the Finals three years in a row. And for our core group, I guess that would be four or five guys... that’s a long haul and you just cannot lose your edge in this league’

Reuters
New York

The Golden State Warriors begin the 2017-18 NBA season this week so dominant that a number of teams pulled off blockbuster deals in hopes of denying them a third title in four years.

The Houston Rockets, Oklahoma City Thunder, Boston Celtics and Cleveland Cavaliers are among the teams who made offseason deals for All-Star players with the hope of unseating a Warriors club many feel are too good not to win it all.

Golden State return largely the same squad that enjoyed a remarkable 16-1 romp through the playoffs last season but now face a number of new-look challengers.

“The biggest challenge is complacency,” Warriors coach Steve Kerr told *The Athletic*.

“We’ve been to the Finals three years in a row. And for our core group, I guess that would be four or five guys... that’s a long haul and you just cannot lose your edge in this league.”

Since the Warriors beat Cleveland last June in the Finals, a record seven NBA players who were selected as All-Stars in 2017 have switched teams in the hopes of unseating Golden State.

The Warriors will get their first look at one of those retooled challengers on Tuesday when they host Houston in one of the two games scheduled for the opening night of the season.

“We’re chasing maybe one of the best teams ever in the history of basketball,” Houston Rockets coach Mike D’Antoni, whose team acquired nine-times All-Star point guard Chris Paul in a trade with the Los Angeles Clippers, told USA Today.

“Nobody wants to go into the season going, ‘OK, if you have a really good year, you can come in third.’ You just don’t want to do that, so we’re all in.”

Paul and James Harden, who last season finished runner-up in MVP voting, give the Rockets two of the league’s elite floor generals and make Houston perhaps the greatest threat to unseat the Warriors in the Western Conference. But Golden State, already powered by Stephen Curry and Kevin Durant, have added depth to a roster that many already viewed as one of the greatest NBA teams ever assembled.

Health permitting, anything short of a trip to next June’s NBA Finals for the Warriors would be considered a failure of epic proportion.

DOMINANT CAVS

The Cavaliers, whose hopes of a title begin and end with four-times league MVP LeBron James, are coming off a tumultu-



This file picture taken on June 1, 2016 shows Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry (left) and Cleveland Cavaliers forward LeBron James scrambling for a loose ball during the second quarter of Game 1 of the NBA Finals in Oakland, California. (AFP)

ous offseason during which they shipped Kyrie Irving to Boston after the All-Star guard requested a trade.

Cleveland will now hope Isaiah Thomas, the Celtics’ top scorer last season, is his same old self when he returns in January from a hip injury while counting on James’ friend Dwyane Wade and former MVP Derrick Rose to turn back the clock.

The Cavs, who have dominated the Eastern Conference for three straight seasons and despite some defensive issues, appear well-placed to make another deep playoff run.

The season should also see James, who turns 33 in December, become the seventh and youngest player to score 30,000 career points, a feat he is expect-

ed to reach shortly after the mid-way mark of the Cavs campaign.

Boston overhauled their roster after a season in which they finished first in the Eastern Conference but were demoralised by Cleveland in the penultimate round of the playoffs.

Among their many moves, the Celtics acquired Gordon Hayward in free agency and executed a blockbuster trade for Irving to remain one of the East’s elite contenders.

The Oklahoma City Thunder became a major player once again as they bolstered their attack by landing a pair of high-wattage quick fixes in All-Stars Paul George and Carmelo Anthony.

The talented forwards should allow for a more balanced attack

from a Thunder team led by Russell Westbrook, who is coming off an MVP campaign in which he became the first player in 55 years to average a triple-double for an entire season.

“We definitely felt great about what we had before we traded for Carmelo, but adding him takes this team to another level,” said George.

“In my eyes, (he’s) one of the best true scorers and players that this league has ever seen.”

The San Antonio Spurs, whose postseason run fizzled after Kawhi Leonard went down with a sprained ankle in the Western Conference final, are coming off their 20th consecutive year in the playoffs and 18th straight season of winning 50 games and neither streak appears set to end.

LeBron’s future with Cavs may hinge on success this season

LeBron James enters the 2017-18 season with a deeper Cleveland Cavaliers team than the one that lost in last year’s NBA Finals and anything less than a championship in June could mark the end of his second tenure with the team. James can opt out of the final year of his current contract and become an unrestricted free agent after this season, which many pundits feel the game’s greatest player will do if he fails to capture a fourth NBA title. But James, whose departure from Cleveland in 2010 left deep psychic wounds, has refused to get drawn into the debate and is instead focused on leading his new-look Cavs to a fourth straight NBA Finals.

“Any time I’m able to be a free agent or my contract is ending, I’ll approach that when the summer comes,” said James, who returned to Cleveland in 2014 and led the Cavs to their only league title in 2016. “I don’t ever cheat my teammates or cheat the fans or talk about free agency all year long because I’m not going to give energy to something I can handle in the summertime when I should be focused on what I’m doing on a day-to-day basis to help this franchise compete for a championship.”

James, 32, will chase that title with a much different cast of teammates after an offseason in Cleveland that saw the type of turnover usually reserved for developing teams. Gone is All-Star guard Kyrie Irving, who was dealt to the Boston Celtics after he surprisingly requested a trade, and among the newcomers are offensive weapon Isaiah Thomas, out until January with a hip injury, former league MVP Derrick Rose and 12-times All-Star Dwyane Wade.

If all goes according to script, Cleveland should once again roll through the Eastern Conference and into a Finals rematch with the reigning champion Golden State Warriors. For someone like James, who has already accomplished all there is in the game of basketball, winning another title as opposed to any individual awards, could ultimately determine for him whether his 15th NBA season was a success. Prior to the upcoming campaign, James hosted his teammates at the University of California-Santa Barbara last month for workouts and left feeling upbeat about the group’s mindset.

“The best thing about it is guys just came in to work. No entitlement at all,” said James.

“We’re all here for a reason. We want to compete at the highest level. Our coaching staff will give us a game-plan every single night like they always do and it’s up to us to go out an execute.”

Ball pumped up as Lakers start season

When the Los Angeles Lakers took Lonzo Ball with the second overall pick in this year’s NBA draft they didn’t just get a skilled player they believe will take them to the playoffs but a brand who will put the spotlight back on a fading franchise. The newest face of the famed Lakers, Ball comes hyped, packaged and market ready for Hollywood, the Big Baller Brand selling seats and sneakers even before he has played a regular season game. The 6-foot, 6-inch (1.98 metres) point guard, entrepreneur and aspiring rapper is not only preparing to take on the NBA’s best but Nike, Adidas and Under Armour as well with his own Baller Brand apparel and shoe that comes with a Hall of Famer worthy \$495 price tag. Ball may not bring the Lakers a title this season but he has already brought them something nearly as important – attention. There is a no more competitive market place in North American sport than Los Angeles where getting noticed requires more than a 10-game winning streak. As the Lakers prepare to open their season on Thursday against crosstown rivals the Clippers, there is already plenty of competition for sports fans dollars. The Los Angeles Dodgers are closing in on a trip to the World Series while the National Hockey League and college football campaigns are well under way. Two new National Football League teams, the Los Angeles Rams and Chargers, have also set up shop since the Lakers last made the postseason in 2013. Yet, despite a steady decline in the standings that reached rock bottom two seasons ago with a franchise-worst 17-65 record, the Lakers are once again the NBA’s hottest ticket, on the secondary market at least, with sales up 130 percent over last year and much of that being traced to the Lonzo Ball affect. “With the arrival of Lonzo Ball, Lakers fans have renewed hope in the future of their team, which is reflected in StubHub ticket demand,” StubHub spokeswoman Jessica Erskine said. “While young prospects such as Ball and Markelle Fultz of the 76ers have yet to play a regular season game, their arrival can have a big impact on the ticket market, particularly for teams who haven’t made the playoffs lately.” After one year of college basketball with the UCLA Bruins, Ball entered the NBA to howling hype, much of it delivered by his bombastic father and Big Baller Brand CEO LaVar Ball.

SPOTLIGHT

Nowitzki suits up for 20th season with Mavericks

Reuters
New York

Karl Marx is more likely to spring to mind than Dirk Nowitzki when thinking of a German “revolutionary”, but in his own way the 39-year-old from Wurzburg has changed the way basketball is played at the highest level.

Nowitzki brought a new quality to the NBA two decades ago – a big man as comfortable hitting an outside jump shot as banging the boards – and in doing so forced other teams to adjust the way they defended.

“He’s revolutionary,” Chuck Cooperstein, the Mavericks’ play-by-play radio announcer, said in a telephone interview.

“The concept of the stretch forward did not exist until Dirk appeared. Until then you wanted your seven-footers to be close to the basket, posting up and draw-

ing fouls. “This is a credit to Don Nelson, Dirk’s first coach here in Dallas. Don saw a particular skill, that singular ability to shoot the ball that really could change the geometry of the floor.”

The 7-foot (2.13 metres) Nowitzki, who won league most valuable player honours in 2007, is one of very few tall players with a career shooting percentage approaching 50 percent from the floor, 40 percent from three-point range and 90 percent from the foul line.

He is the highest non-American scorer in NBA history, ranked sixth overall with 30,260 points during the regular season at an average of 21.7 per game.

And Nowitzki has done it all with the Mavericks. When he starts the new season tomorrow, he will become only the second player after Kobe Bryant (Los Angeles Lakers) to play 20 seasons with the same team. It has been quite a journey for Nowitzki, who played tennis and

handball as a youngster before switching to basketball, a sport compatible with his height.

He was the ninth overall pick in the 1999 draft, taken by the Milwaukee Bucks and immediately dealt to Dallas.

The architect of the Mavericks’ only NBA championship in 2011, he signed a one-year guaranteed \$5 million deal that had some observers saying he was too nice a guy for not maximising his value.

“Dirk has been criticised in some quarters for not holding a billionaire (owner Mark Cuban) over a barrel,” Cooperstein said.

“Dirk has never used a super agent. He’s never been part of that culture. He’s left a lot of money on the table to allow the Mavericks the ultimate flexibility to do whatever they want.”

Not that Nowitzki will have to worry about bouncing a check any time soon.

“The man has still made over \$240 million over his career,”

said Cooperstein. “He’s not going hungry.”

Nowitzki’s down-to-earth personality in a league full of large egos has been well documented, and Cooperstein has seen it first hand, including the time he saw the player help the team’s equipment personnel unload luggage from the team bus at 2am during a road trip.

Why has Nowitzki remained so grounded?

“I think it’s his background,” said Cooperstein. “Coming from Germany, which did not have a huge basketball culture, he didn’t grow up in the (American college) pipeline, being told from the age of 13 he’d be the next big thing. “He gets it on every imaginable level. He’s never sold shoes, appeared in commercials, because that’s never been his thing but he’s adored by the players.”

“The stars around the league have a tremendous respect for how he plays and for his contribution to the game.”



Dallas Mavericks star Dirk Nowitzki.

BASEBALL

Turner’s walk-off homer lifts Dodgers over Cubs

AFP
Los Angeles

Justin Turner belted a three-run walkoff homer to lift the Los Angeles Dodgers to a 4-1 victory over the Chicago Cubs on Sunday, extending their lead in the National League Championship Series. The score was knotted at 1-1 with the Dodgers down to one out in the bottom of the ninth when Turner powered a 92 mph (148.06 Km/h) fastball from Cubs hurler John Lackey over the centerfield wall at Dodger Stadium. Yasiel Puig and Chris Taylor, who had both been walked earlier in the inning, also scored as the Dodgers took a 2-0 lead over the reigning World Series champion Cubs in the best-of-seven playoff series. Third baseman Turner drove in the Dodgers’ first run as well with a two-out, run-batted-in single off of cubs starter Jon Lester in the bottom of the fifth inning. Cubs shortstop Addison Russell had opened the scoring with a solo home run off of Dodgers starting pitcher Rich Hill in the top of the fifth. Turner’s second home run of the post-season came on the 29th anniversary of Kirk Gibson’s pinch-hit walk-off home run for the Dodgers in game one of the 1988 World Series -- the last time the Dodgers won the title and their most recent appearance in Major League Baseball’s Fall Classic. The Cubs, who ended a 108-year title drought last season, will try to get back on track when they host game three on Tuesday at Wrigley Field. “Tonight’s gotten us one step closer, but there’s still a lot of work in front of us, and we’re going to enjoy it for a little bit and get back to work and prepare for the next one,” Turner said. The winner of the series will face either the Houston Astros or New York Yankees in the World Series. The Astros lead the Yankees 2-0 in the American League Championship Series with game three in New York on Monday. As in Los Angeles’ 2-1 win on Saturday, bullpen pitching was key for the Dodgers and Cubs. Dodgers manager Dave Roberts pulled Hill after five innings. Four Dodgers relievers then combined for four near-perfect innings, with only closer Kenley Jansen allowing a base runner when he hit Anthony Rizzo with a pitch. Jansen followed by striking out Wil-

son Contreras and inducing Albert Almora to ground out to end the top of the ninth. “Fairly excited” Puig was walked by Cubs reliever Brian Duensing to open the bottom of the ninth. He advanced to second on Charlie Culberson’s sacrifice bunt. After pinch-hitter Kyle Farmer struck out, Cubs manager Joe Maddon brought in Lackey to face Chris Taylor, who walked to bring up Turner. “I hit a ball pretty good to center earlier in the game, and Almora’s an unbelievable center fielder,” Turner said. “So I was just watching him hoping he wasn’t going to catch it. When it did end up going over the fence, obviously I was fairly xcited.” Cubs starter Lester, pitching on three-days rest after appearing in relief in game four of the first round, gave up a run on three hits before departing after 4 2/3 innings. Maddon said lack of scoring, not pitching, was the problem for the Cubs. “We scored one run today. That’s the issue,” he said. “We’ve scored 11 runs in six games during the playoffs. So we just have to become more offensive.”

Los Angeles Dodgers third baseman Justin Turner celebrates after hitting a walk off home run in the ninth inning to defeat the Chicago Cubs in game two of the 2017 NLCS playoff baseball series at Dodger Stadium. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports



NFL

Packers lose Rodgers, Chiefs drop first game

‘Losing Aaron Rodgers speaks for itself. In my opinion, he’s the best player in football’

AFP
Los Angeles

In a major setback for a Super Bowl championship contender, Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers suffered a broken right collarbone Sunday and could miss the remainder of the NFL season. The 33-year-old signal caller suffered the injury in the opening quarter of the Packers’ 23-10 loss at Minnesota, leaving both teams with 4-2 records. “Losing Aaron Rodgers speaks for itself,” Packers coach Mike McCarthy said. “In my opinion, he’s the best player in football.” In other games Sunday, Adrian Peterson made a successful debut for the Arizona Cardinals in their 38-33 win over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, the New England Patriots cooled off the red-hot New York Jets and the Pittsburgh Steelers ended the Kansas City Chiefs’ unbeaten run. Rodgers was hurt after taking a hard hit from Vikings linebacker Anthony Barr and falling on his throwing shoulder. X-rays showed the extent of the damage. “QB Aaron Rodgers suffered a broken collarbone. There’s a chance he could miss the rest of the season,” stated the Packers’ Twitter announcement. Rodgers missed seven games in 2013 after suffering a broken left collarbone. Running to his right on a second down play from Green Bay’s 39-yard line less than nine minutes into the contest, Rodgers was struck by Barr after tossing an incomplete pass, landing on his throwing arm. Rodgers completed two-of-four throws for 18 yards before the injury. Brett Hundley replaced Rodgers and finished 18 of 33 for 157 yards with a touchdown and three interceptions. Rodgers was the Super Bowl 45 Most Valuable Player in 2011 as he led the Packers to a 31-25



Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers (No 12) is taken off the field on a cart in the first quarter against the Minnesota Vikings at US Bank Stadium. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

victory over Pittsburgh. Elsewhere, Le’Veon Bell rushed for 179 yards as the Steelers defeated Kansas City 19-13, handing the Chiefs their first loss of the season. Bell carried 32 times and scored on a three-yard run early in the second quarter. “We came in expecting to run the ball and we stuck to that game plan,” Bell said. “We got the W today.” Ben Roethlisberger completed 17-of-25 passes for 252 yards and a touchdown while Kansas City’s quarterback Alex Smith finished 19 of 34 for 246 yards. Chiefs rookie running back

Kareem Hunt was held to 21 yards. Kansas City linebacker Derrick Johnson said the Steelers played with more intensity. “You’ve got to play the right way. They were tougher than us today,” Johnson said. In Phoenix, Peterson rushed for a pair of touchdowns as Arizona defeated Tampa Bay. Peterson ran 26 times for 134 yards in his Arizona debut as the Cardinals stormed to a 31-0 lead. Quarterback Carson Palmer was 18 of 22 for 283 yards with three touchdowns while Larry Fitzgerald caught 10 passes for 138 yards. Tampa Bay quarterback Ja-

meis Winston did not return after injuring his right shoulder in the second quarter. Ryan Fitzpatrick replaced Winston and completed 22 of 32 passes for 290 yards and three touchdowns. In New Jersey, quarterback Tom Brady connected with Rob Gronkowski on a 33-yard touchdown in the third quarter to give New England the lead for good as the Patriots defeated the Jets 24-17 to claim sole possession of first place in the AFC East. New England won its 11th straight road game and has won six of its last seven against the Jets, who had their three game winning streak

snapped. Gronkowski scored two touchdowns - his first multi-touchdown game since the 2015 season-opener against Pittsburgh. **RESULTS**
Steelers 19 Chiefs 13
Chargers 17 Raiders 16
Cardinals 38 Buccaneers 33
Rams 27 Jaguars 17
Vikings 23 Packers 10
Dolphins 20 Falcons 17
Giants 23 Broncos 10
Patriots 24 Jets 17
Saints 52 Lions 38
Texans 33 Browns 17
Bears 27 Ravens 24
(overtime) Redskins 26 49ers 24

Kaepernick files grievance claiming owners collusion

Former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, an NFL free agent who last year began the kneeling protest during US anthems that became a major controversy, has filed a collusion grievance against the NFL. Six weeks into the NFL season the 29-year-old Kaepernick is still without a job despite a number of job openings created by injuries to other quarterbacks. Kaepernick and his lawyer, Mark Geragos, are claiming the owners violated terms of the collective bargaining agreement, specifically a

clause that prohibits teams from acting together in regards to a player’s employment status. He filed his grievance on Sunday just days before the owners are scheduled to meet in New York. “We can confirm that this morning we filed a grievance under the CBA on behalf of Colin Kaepernick,” Geragos said in a statement. “This was done only after pursuing every possible avenue with all NFL teams and their executives. “If the NFL (as well as all professional sports leagues) is to remain a meritocracy, then principled and peace-

ful political protests - which the owners themselves made great theatre imitating weeks ago - should not be punished and athletes should not be denied employment based on partisan political provocation by the Executive Branch of our government. “Such a precedent threatens all patriotic Americans and harkens back to our darkest days as a nation. Protecting all athletes from such collusive conduct is what compelled Mr. Kaepernick to file his grievance.” Kaepernick, who spent six seasons with the 49ers, appears

ready to go to court rather than go through the players union with his grievance claim. Kaepernick claims owners have colluded to keep him out of the league because of his kneeling protests during the playing of “The Star-Spangled Banner” last year. Kaepernick opted out of his contract with the 49ers in March but found no team willing to sign him despite past successes that included leading the 49ers to the 2013 Super Bowl, where they lost to Baltimore 34-31. Tensions were raised about the kneeling when US President Donald

Trump last month called any NFL player kneeling during the anthem a “son of a bitch” and said they should be fired. That has prompted a rise in the number of players who kneel or link arms in a sign of unity over the past four weeks and set the stage for league executives and owners to talk about the matter in depth next week at regularly scheduled club owners meetings. The NFL players association responded Sunday with a statement offering Kaepernick its support and reiterating that it is prepared to assist him, “as we do all players.”

NHL

Kopitar, Brown lead Kings to 3-2 victory over Islanders

By Curtis Zupke
Los Angeles Times

The mojo between Anze Kopitar and Dustin Brown has reached a point where they can combine for a goal even though neither actually put the puck in the net. Midway through the first period Sunday, Kopitar executed what seemed like a called shot in a game of H-O-R-S-E: Through the defender’s legs, off another defender’s stick and between the goalie’s legs. His intended pass to a driving Brown unfolded in that exact pattern against the New York Islanders. It was an instant snapshot of the Los Angeles Kings through five games. Brown and Kopitar have scored eight of the Kings’ 16 goals, and they combined for a great defensive play that led to the game-winning short-handed goal in a 3-2 win at Staples Center. “I think they’ve been big-time leaders of our hockey team through training camp,” Kings coach John Stevens said. “I think they’ve been tremendous on both sides of the puck. It’s nice to see Kopi and Brownie get off to good starts offensively. ... They’re playing the game the right way, and they’re representing the identity of the hockey team that we want to have, and it’s great to see.” The announced crowd of 18,230 fans for a rare Sunday night game witnessed the best five-game start in Kings history at 4-0-1. Darcy Kuemper was victorious in his Kings debut and Jake Muzzin scored on an all-cylinders power play that is 4-for-6 after a 0-for-16 start in the first three games. Drew Doughty sealed it with a short-handed goal, the second of his career, in the third. “I’ve always wanted to be a forward again, but I don’t know if that will ever happen,” Doughty said. “When I get my chance to get up there, I’m go-

ing to get up there.” The Kings’ three previous wins came against teams that have a combined five wins, and the Islanders are not considered contenders, either, despite having one of the best centers in the world in John Tavares. The Kings countered with their own world-class center in Kopitar, who distracted Tavares away from the puck to start the possession on his score. His fourth goal of the season represents a polar turnaround from last season, when his fourth goal came Jan 9. Kuemper played in the pre-season but it was his first regular season game since April 8, with the Minnesota Wild. He didn’t see his first shot until nearly seven minutes into the game, and the Kings’ strong possession game made for a quiet start in their end. Kuemper got a lot busier in the opening 10 minutes of the second period. The Islanders took back the ice and got rewarded with their first goal when Josh Bailey whacked in the puck from his knees in the slot. They pulled to 3-2 with 5:39 remaining on wraparound by Casey Cizikas. Kuemper made 23 saves, including 10 in the third period. “There’s a few areas I need sharpen up,” Kuemper said. “But I felt pretty good about it. I thought the guys defended hard and made it easy to come in for not playing for a while. My hats off to them. I’m just very happy with the win.” Doughty drew high praise from Stevens for his defensive matchup with Tavares, to make Kuemper’s night run smoothly. “Drew just seemed like he ramped up his intensity,” Stevens said. “When the game got bigger, he got better ... He wants to make a difference, and he was a difference maker tonight.”

RESULTS		
Sabres	3 Ducks	1
Golden Knights	3 Bruins	1
Kings	3 Islanders	2



Los Angeles Kings centre Anze Kopitar controls the puck against New York Islanders defenseman Scott Mayfield during the second period at Staples Center. **PICTURE:** USA TODAY Sports

TENNIS

Federer eyes ATP Finals title, No 1 after Shanghai triumph

‘London is my priority now and I really want to win the World Tour Finals. I am very excited to have had the year that I have had and everything that comes from here is a bonus’

Reuters
Shanghai

Roger Federer is eyeing a seventh ATP Finals crown and has not ruled out pinching the world number one ranking from Rafa Nadal if he maintains the form that won him his second Shanghai Masters trophy on Sunday.

The 19-times grand slam winner claimed his 94th title and sixth this year with an emphatic defeat of Nadal in the Shanghai final and is hungry for a first ATP Finals win since 2011.

“London is my priority now and I really want to win the World Tour Finals,” the ever-green 36-year-old told Sky Sports. “I am very excited to have had the year that I have had and everything that comes from here is a bonus.

“Finishing the year as world number one is a long shot, and I don’t think it will happen but if I play like this, who knows? Maybe I will get close again.”

Shanghai was Federer’s first tournament since the US Open and the confidence he gained from his opening matches helped him through a taxing schedule.

“It’s been a tough week, five straight matches is always a test and a challenge for anybody’s body, especially with the pressure rising,” he said.

“I felt I was playing well all week and that settled my nerves because I was returning well from the (opening) match here against (Diego) Schwartzman.

“The serve only got better and I saved the best for last... In a way, not surprising because I felt good all week – I was ready.”

Federer extended his lead on the ‘Big Titles’ scoreboard over rivals Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal by beating the Spanish left-hander to earn his second title at the Shanghai Rolex Masters on Sunday.

In taking down his longtime rival, Nadal, Federer captured his fifth ‘Big Title’ of the season, winning two Grand Slams at the Australian Open and Wimbledon as well as earning an ATP World Tour-leading third Masters 1000



Roger Federer of Switzerland poses with his trophy after beating Rafael Nadal in the final at the Shanghai Masters in Shanghai. (AFP)

trophy. The first two came at the BNP Paribas Open and the Miami Open presented by Itau.

The Swiss upped his total of ‘Big Titles’ – a combination of Grand Slams, Masters 1000 events and Nitto ATP Finals – to 52, five ahead of Djokovic’s 47 and six in front of Nadal’s 46.

The battle for ‘Big Title’ supremacy remains intense, as Djokovic continues to hold the record for best conversion rate, winning one ‘Big Title’ every 3.4 events, with Nadal close behind at 3.5. Federer has won an average of one title per 4.1 tournaments. But with his victory in

Shanghai, the 36 year old moved closer to Nadal and Djokovic’s record of 30 Masters 1000 victories with his 27th title.

He can move closer to their mark in two weeks at the final Masters 1000 tournament of 2017, the Rolex Paris Masters.

The Swiss next headlines his home Basel International starting October 21.

ATP Top 5

1. Rafael Nadal (ESP) 10,465 pts
2. Roger Federer (SUI) 8,505
3. Andy Murray (GBR) 5,290
4. Marin Cilic (CRO) 4,505 (+1)
5. Alexander Zverev (GER) 4,400

Sharapova shoots up rankings after Tianjin win

Maria Sharapova has shot up the women’s world rankings following her victory in Tianjin on Sunday, rising 29 places to 57th in the latest WTA list.

The 30-year-old former world number one triumphed 7-5, 7-6 (10/8) against teenager Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus to claim her first title since serving a 15-month doping ban. Sharapova will hope to build on that victory this week in Moscow after being handed a wildcard for the Kremlin Cup.

The top 10 remains unchanged, with Romania’s Si-

mona Halep on top ahead of Spain’s Garbine Muguruza. Russia’s Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova climbs three places to 18th after beating Daria Gavrilova in the Hong Kong Open final at the weekend.

Czech Barbora Strycova, winner of her second WTA Tour title in Linz on Sunday, climbs just one place to 25th.

WTA Top 5

1. Simona Halep (ROU) 6,175 pts
2. Garbine Muguruza (ESP) 6,135
3. Karolina Pliskova (CZE) 5,605
4. Elina Svitolina (UKR) 5,465
5. Venus Williams (USA) 4,642

MOTORCYCLING

Qatar rider Darwish finishes 9th overall at Spanish Championship

QNA
Madrid

Qatari bike driver Youssef Darwish achieved a good result at the ninth and final round of the Spanish Motorcycle Championship, which was held at the Montmelo Circuit. Darwish, 12, participated in the 300cc category where he finished ninth in the overall standings.

The Qatari motorcyclist participated in the 180cc category in the previous rounds where he achieved good results qualified him to participate in the 300cc competitions.

Darwish insisted on participating in the final race, despite his injury in order to reach the best possible preparation for the Asian qualifiers for the Moto3 tournament scheduled for next week in Malaysia to advance to the Asian Championship, which will be host by several countries including Qatar, with more than 120 contestants to participate in the qualifications and 30 cyclists will advance to the Asian tournament.

The Spanish championship

is one of the largest international motorcycle tournaments in the world, and is also the most prestigious tournaments to discover the emerging talent.

The Qatari motorcyclist is scheduled to continue his training in Mallorca for two days before returning to Doha.

He will continue his training for four days before travelling to Malaysia for the Asian qualifiers on October 24.

Darwish thanked the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF), headed by Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Latif al-Mannai, for the great support that allowed him to participate in the Spanish championship and to have a training camp in Spain before the Asian qualifiers.

Darwish said his goal of participating in the 300cc category in the final round of the Spanish championship is to gain experience before participating in the Asian qualifiers, especially as the qualifiers will be in the same category. Darwish pointed out that it was necessary for him to get used to the new bike before participating in the Asian challenge.

INTERVIEW

Ecclestone moving to Switzerland after Formula 1 exit

Reuters
London

Formula One’s former commercial supremo **Bernie Ecclestone** is moving further away from the sport he ruled for decades by relocating to Switzerland.

The Briton, who will be 87 this month, was ousted in January after US-based Liberty Media took control and gave him an undefined role as emeritus chairman.

“It’s something I had agreed to do 20 years ago, or more: To take Formula One (Management) to Switzerland,” Ecclestone, who has lived in London for most of his life, told Reuters yesterday.

“Trouble is I couldn’t get all the guys to come and live there. I don’t blame them, they had kids and were settled very well in England.

“I don’t have to do anything particular with the company now so I can more or less do what I want,” he said, denying the move was for tax reasons.

Ecclestone owns a hotel in the Swiss ski resort of Gstaad, among other business interests, and has had residence for nearly 30 years.

In London he had an apartment above the shop – Formula One’s offices in well-heeled Knightsbridge. “Instead of just popping over (to Switzerland) for a few days and keeping my eye on things it will be nice, I think, if I lived there and I can pop back to England when I want to,” he said.

The sport remains head-



quartered in Britain, the staff now in new premises in central London and Ecclestone, while remaining a paid employee, has little involvement. “I’m so high up in the company now, I can’t see anything,” he commented wryly.

Ecclestone said Liberty was not keen for him to attend races and he could understand that. “I think this year for them it’s all new and I think it’s better that I’m not around because people know me,” he said. “It’d be difficult for them to get known properly and accepted if there’s somebody else there all the time that they think is stealing their glory.”

A Formula One spokesman said that was not the case.

“Bernie is always welcome at any grand prix he’d like to attend,” he said, although limited office space at some tracks meant prior notice was preferred.

Ecclestone was in Bahrain, Russia, Azerbaijan and Austria this season and will be back for the penultimate round in Brazil next month. His wife Fabiana is Brazilian and they own a farm there.

SPOTLIGHT

Al Rayyan Horse Farm wins 5 medals

QNA
Milan

Al Rayyan Farm has won five medals in the 2017 Straight Egyptian World Championship for horse beauty, which concluded Sunday in Milano.

Of the five medals, two were gold, two silver medal and one bronze.

Meanwhile, Al Shaqab stud horses will participate in El Jadida Horse Show

in Morocco, which is being held in Morocco.

Al Shaqab Breeding and Show Department Manager

HE Sheikh Hamad bin Ali al-Thani expressed his delight at the achievement of Qatari horses at the Straight Egyptian World Championship, stressing that it is a milestone for Al Rayyan Farm, which exerts a lot of effort to preserve Arabian horses. He hoped that successes would continue at El Jadida Horse Show.

HE Sheikh Hamad bin Ali al-Thani said that preserving Arabian horse breeds and achieving such outstanding results prove that Qatar has the best Arabian horse breeds and constantly works to develop its capacities in this area by owning several original Arabian horses.

RUGBY

Webb’s place in danger as Wales change selection policy

AFP
London

Wales scrum-half Rhys Webb is in danger of becoming the first high-profile casualty of his country’s new selection policy.

British and Irish Lions star Webb has agreed to leave Pro14 outfit Ospreys to join French club Toulon next season.

But the 28-year-old learned yesterday that he could be ineligible for national duty in the future after Welsh Rugby chiefs announced changes to their international selection policy in an attempt to stem the exodus of talent from the country.

Under the new rules, which take effect immediately, players based abroad with 60 caps or more will be eligible to represent Wales. Until now, players based outside Wales required one of four wildcard picks to represent their country under the so-called “Gatland’s Law”.

That system was designed to keep players in Wales but it did not work, with a clutch of star names currently in the English

Premiership including George North, Liam Williams, Jamie Roberts and Taulupe Faletau.

Dan Biggar, who will join Northampton next season, currently has 56 caps, but he is likely to hit the 60-mark this season with Wales having four autumn Tests and then a Six Nations campaign. If Webb’s Toulon move goes ahead, the 28 times-capped star would be caught by the new policy and ruled ineligible.

“I am very disappointed at the news because I love playing for Wales. It means a huge amount to me,” Webb was quoted as saying by WalesOnline. “It’s a real blow that I won’t be able to play international Rugby from next season.

“I didn’t know the full implications when I agreed to join Toulon because the change in the selection policy came out after I signed. I have given 10 years service to the Ospreys and Welsh Rugby and have picked up injuries along the way. I would have hoped that would have been taken into consideration.

“I still very much want to play for Wales this season and hope I can gain selection for the autumn international squad.”

An exception to the rule is

call-ups for uncapped players currently contracted outside of Wales – to keep their eligibility a newly capped player will be required to return to Wales at the expiration of their deal.

“Whatever contract that a player is on today, that contract is protected,” Welsh Rugby Union chief executive Martyn Phillips said.

“When that contract expires and if the player has fewer than 60 caps, they would not be eligible for selection. If they have 60 or more caps and they are outside Wales they would be.”

Wales head coach Warren Gatland said: “For me as a national coach, if I was being perfectly selfish, would I have a policy? No, I wouldn’t.

“It is not about me or the national team, it is about what is the best thing for Welsh Rugby.

“I had a good conversation with Rhys. He is 28, has had injuries, he is thinking about himself, his future and his family, and so he may have made that decision whether he was captured or not.

“He can still get out of his Toulon contract. He has just signed a letter of agreement.”

Flanker Cane commits to New Zealand to 2021

All Blacks loose forward and captain-in-waiting Sam Cane has committed to New Zealand rugby through to 2021. The 25-year-old, set to play his 50th test in the All Blacks’ final Bledisloe Cup match against Australia on Saturday, will also remain with Super Rugby’s Waikato Chiefs and provincial side Bay of Plenty for the next four years.

“I’ve grown up supporting all three teams and they’re teams that I love, so to re-sign was ultimately an easy decision for me, while the security of a long-term contract is great for me at this point in my career,” Cane said in a media release yesterday. “Even though I’ve been in the All Blacks for five years now, there is still heaps more I want to achieve in the black jersey. “I’m in a leadership role with the All Blacks and the Chiefs and that’s something I enjoy, and I want to contribute any way I can in helping lead and drive both those teams to succeed.”

Cane has been the All Blacks’ first-choice number seven since the retirement of skipper Richie McCaw after the 2015 World Cup and is widely tipped as a future captain of the side. All Blacks coach Steve Hansen hailed Cane’s loyalty to New Zealand rugby, with more lucrative opportunities generally available overseas.

“I want to congratulate Sammy on his decision. He’s grown hugely as a player since he came into the All Blacks five years ago,” said Hansen. “He’s part of our leadership group, has captained the side on two occasions and he continues to play to the highest standards whenever he takes the field and never lets the jersey down. “He’s still a young man and knowing that he’s staying through to 2021 is fantastic for the long-term growth of the All Blacks and his experience and knowledge will be invaluable to the team in the years to come.”

Uncapped back Richie Mo’unga was called into the All Blacks squad on Monday as temporary cover in the flyhalf position behind Lima Sopoaga and first choice Beauden Barrett, who suffered a head knock in the last test against South Africa.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar shines at Salon du Cheval d'El Jadida

QREC, Ministry of Culture & Sports, Qatar Equestrian Federation and Al Shaqab are representing Qatar in the event

The Salon du Cheval d'El Jadida began yesterday with participation from the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC), the Ministry of Culture and Sports, Qatar Equestrian Federation and Al Shaqab. The Qatari participation in the exhibition was represented by the Racing and Equestrian Club pavilion at the exhibition being held under the patronage of King Mohamed VI of Morocco.

The Qatar ambassador to Morocco, Abdulla bin Falah al-Dosari lauded the Qatari participation of QREC in the Salon in its tenth edition. "I would like to commend the excellent relations between Qatar and Morocco in all areas", said the ambassador.

"This participation in the Salon du Cheval d'El Jadida is a true embodiment of these relations".

Issa bin Mohamed al-Mohannadi, Chairman of the Racing and Equestrian Club said, "In support of the outstanding relations between the State of Qatar and the Kingdom of Morocco, we are honoured to participate in this major event which focuses on highlighting the heritage of horses, especially since Arabian horses have been an integral part of the Qatari heritage, as well as the leadership of the State of Qatar in the field of Arabian horses, and we are proud to present our heritage here today along with other esteemed bodies supporting the Qatari culture."

He added: "Such international partnerships are essential in strengthening the State of Qatar's presence on the world stage and supporting our heritage, culture and traditions. The State of Qatar is a source of the best and strongest breed of Arabian horses in the world, and I am honoured to co-operate with all stakeholders. We are always keen to take advantage of the opportunities we have to represent the State of Qatar in all regional and international events, despite any crises or obstacles."

This new edition of the exhibition, which focuses on traditional horse heritage in the Kingdom of Morocco, will highlight the most prominent traditional equestrian arts and crafts from around the world.

Salon du Cheval d'El Jadida, which is held annually, hosts 120 exhibitors from 38 countries, with 250,000 visitors attending the exhibition which showcases various equestrian events.

Nasser bin Sharida al-Kaabi, General Manager of Racing and Equestrian Club said: "The club has been participating in this exhibition for more than 10 years, but 2017 is of particular importance to us as the State of Qatar is the guest of honour at the exhibition."

The QREC has made a strong impression on the exhibition and was a distinguished ambassador to the State of Qatar on both Moroccan soil and the international arena represented in the



The Qatar ambassador to Morocco, Abdulla bin Falah al-Dosari with QREC Chairman Issa al-Mohannadi, QREC GM Nasser Sherida al-Kaabi and other dignitaries at the Salon du Cheval d'El Jadida in Morocco. At bottom, Qatar equestrian ace Sheikh Ali bin Khalid al-Thani.



exhibition. Through its contributions to a wide range of recreational, cultural, artistic and sports activities, the QREC reaffirms Qatar's strong presence at the helm of this international sporting event.

The Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) was founded in the early 1960s and was officially established in 1975. It is responsible for representing, promoting and developing horse and equestrian initiatives, from pro-

grammes aimed at the general public to the world stage. By focusing on equestrian and horse welfare to strengthening the status of the State of Qatar as a global centre for horse racing, QREC is working to establish Qatar as a leader



A performer at the Salon du Cheval d'El Jadida in Morocco. At bottom, the Qatari pavilion at the exhibition.



in the field of Arabian horses.

By co-operating with local authorities that are keen to achieve excellence in planning, organising and developing horse racing in Qatar, QREC cements its dedication to reflecting the

best international practices on a global platform. Through innovation and excellence and underpinned by professionalism and integrity, the QREC seeks to educate the wider public about the fun of racing and horse breeding.

FOOTBALL

QFA, QF hold University League draw



The Qatar Football Association (QFA), in collaboration with Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), conducted the draw for the fifth University League today at QF's Recreation Center.

Eleven colleges and universities will participate in this year's league. Universities were divided into two groups, with six teams in Group A and five teams in Group B. The universities will first play group stage matches followed by a semi-finals stage contested by the top two teams from each group.

The tournament is set to take place on pitch 1 of QF's Recreation Center from Thursday, October 19, to Thursday, November 30.

The league will consist of 29 matches held over seven weekends, allowing players to focus on study commitments. Games will be played on Thursdays and Saturdays, with the semi-finals and final played on two Thursdays, one week apart.

Defending champions Qatar University (QU) are in group B with Northwestern University in Qatar, College of North Atlantic - Qatar, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, and Qatar Aeronautical

College while group A features Texas A&M University at Qatar, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, Academic Bridge Program, Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar, Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar and Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar.

The University League is an illustration of QFA and QF's ongoing commitment to nurture a football culture in Qatar, specifically among young people.

Qatar University has won four titles to date, making it the sole winner of the league since its

inception. Qatar University will also participate this season in QFA's Qatar Amateur League, a tournament which allows football teams from Qatar's social, corporate, and government sectors to integrate via organised football.

Established in 2013, the league is sponsored by the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy as the official strategic partner, Ooredoo as the official telecommunication partner, Qatar National Bank as the exclusive financial partner, Nike as the official supplier, and Al Kass Sports Channels as the official broadcaster.

CRICKET

Porter ruled out of Lions tour

AFP
London

Essex seamer Jamie Porter has withdrawn from the England Lions tour of Australia after suffering a stress fracture of the lower back.

Porter propelled Essex to an unexpected county championship title with 75 wickets at 16.82, netting twin awards from the Cricket Writers' Club and the Professional Cricketers' Association.

A trip to Australia, where the Lions will effectively shadow the Ashes squad during November and December, was seen as the next step in the 24-year-old's development.

The stress fracture was spotted during tests by the Lions and Porter will instead link up with the England and Wales Cricket Board's pace programme to build fitness. Worcestershire's Josh Tongue will step up to the Lions tour.