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BASEBALL | Page 5

Seager shines as Dodgers clinch 7th straight NL West title



BASKETBALL | Page 7

France send USA packing out of World Cup

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GULF TIMES SPORT

FOOTBALL

Ronaldo hits four for Portugal against Lithuania

Page 3

FOOTBALL

Shock draw with Qatar fills India with pride

Reuters
New Delhi

India are unlikely to make it to their first World Cup finals this time around but a 0-0 draw in Doha against Asian champions Qatar in 2022 qualifying on Tuesday has filled them with pride.

Cricket is king in India with football a distant second in the list of the country's favourite sports, though most fans rarely pay attention to Indian soccer, instead preferring to watch the English Premier League or La Liga.

Igor Stimac's team, ranked 103rd in the world, have given a good account of themselves in their first two matches in Group E. They led Oman 1-0 in their opener last week but conceded two goals in the last

eight minutes to go down 2-1 at home. Few gave the side any chance of coming away with anything but a defeat to 2022 hosts Qatar, a team ranked 41 places higher than India, but stout defending and some superb goalkeeping from Gurpreet Singh Sandhu helped them earn a point.

"Definitely a night to remember..." Sandhu tweeted after the match, adding that he hoped the result would inspire them against Bangladesh and Afghanistan, the other teams in Group E, both of whom are ranked even lower than India.

"The effort, the will and the guts shown by everyone in the team was truly inspiring. This result will help us to keep grow as a team and as a nation."

Qatar enjoyed 63% possession and had 13 shots on target but Sandhu was unbeatable. "We have played just two matches, and

we have played well, that too against two powerful teams," the goalkeeper said.

"It gives us that added motivation and confidence that in football, anything is possible."

India's talismanic forward Sunil Chhetri missed the match with a fever but was thrilled with the team's gutsy display.

"THAT is my team and THOSE are my boys! Cannot describe how proud I am at this moment," tweeted the 35-year-old.

"Not a big result for the table, but in terms of a fight, as big as it can get. Huge credit to the coaching staff and the dressing room."

Qatar top the group with four points from two matches, one ahead of Oman and Afghanistan. The eight group winners and the four best runners-up advance to the third round of qualification for the World Cup.



India's goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu (C, top) leaps to pounce the ball during their match against Qatar at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha on Tuesday.

CRICKET

Australia hungry to finish off Ashes series in style

To stand any chance of levelling the series, England will have to find a way to solve the riddle of the immovable Smith, who has scored 671 runs in just five innings

AFP
London

Australia head to the Oval hungry to win their first Ashes series in England since 2001 as the peerless Steve Smith seeks to inflict further pain on the hosts.

Tim Paine's men finally saw off stubborn England at Old Trafford on Sunday to take a 2-1 lead in the five-Test series with just one match to go, meaning they will retain the urn.

To stand any chance of levelling the series, the World Cup winners will have to find a way to solve the riddle of the immovable Smith, who has scored 671 runs in just five innings at an astonishing average of more than 134.

The former captain, top of the international rankings, has carried his team's batting with three centuries and two fifties, including a double-century in the win in Manchester, with Marnus Labuschagne the only other batsman who has shown any consistency.

Smith, who returned to Test action in England after completing a 12-month ball-tampering ban, has made his mountain of runs despite missing three innings after he was felled by a Jofra Archer bouncer.

Given a full series, the freakish Smith might well be even closer to Don Bradman's mark of 974 runs for the most runs ever made in a Test series, set in 1930.

The other key factor for Australia has been the strength of their pace attack, with Josh Hazlewood and world number one Pat Cummins catching the eye with 42 wickets between them.

Australia coach Justin Langer, revelling in having the world's



England's Jos Buttler (L) and Ben Stokes play a game of football during a training session at The Oval in London yesterday.

top-ranked batsman and bowler at his disposal, is urging the other batsmen to step up in the match starting on Thursday, even though he admits they lack experience.

"You can't just give them that experience, they have to earn that and we're very thankful to have Steve batting," he said. "I've never seen batting like that."

"You've still got to perform whether you're young or you're a veteran, but we also have to recognise they are young batsmen and it's a really tough school and hopefully they'll come through at some point."

Joe Root must inspire his

troops to one last effort after a gruelling season in which England became world champions in the 50-over format for the first time. Their failure in the Ashes has prompted questions over the Yorkshireman's position, but outgoing coach Trevor Bayliss is adamant the captain retains the support of the England hierarchy.

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

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

many runs as they'd like. I think the Australian team have bowled pretty well to him."

England talisman Ben Stokes was included in an unchanged 13-man squad but will be assessed to find out whether he is fit to bowl at the Oval.

The England vice-captain did not bowl in Australia's second innings at Old Trafford following a right shoulder injury sustained in the tourists' first innings.

If Stokes is unfit to bowl in London, he is expected to play as a specialist batsman, meaning either Sam Curran or Chris Woakes would come into the side and one of the struggling bats-

men would make way, perhaps Jason Roy.

Stokes is England's top-scorer in the series, with 354 runs and two centuries but, with the exception of Rory Burns, the rest of the batsmen have struggled to build totals for the bowlers to defend.

In the continuing absence of the injured James Anderson, Root will be relying on his new-ball pairing of Stuart Broad and Archer to do the damage.

But he will know that for every minute Smith is at the crease, any hopes of denying Australia a first series win in England for 18 years will recede.

SPOTLIGHT

East-to-West Ultra Run to be held on Dec 6

QNA
Doha

Qatar Sports for All Federation has announced the Qatar East-to-West Ultra Run to take place on December 6 as part of its ongoing activities to encourage all segments of society to participate in sports.

Chairman of the organising committee of the race, Abdullah al-Dosari, explained that the Qatar Sports for All Federation aims to promote a healthy lifestyle through the provision of services and activities to the public, including raising awareness among young people, develop their

capabilities and improve their level of sports, fitness and psychological well-being.

He added that the race will be run over a total distance of about 90km, with the Corniche identified as the starting point and Dukhan Beach as the end point. It will be held over five phases in order to give the participants some rest.

Al-Dosari explained that the race is only for amateurs and is expected to be completed in about 17 hours.

He added that every participant will be awarded a medal since the main purpose of the race is to encourage the community to exercise and promote a healthy lifestyle.



Organising committee chairman Abdulla al-Dosari announcing details of the Ultra Run yesterday.

Qatar to participate in LGCT event in France

Paris: Qatar's Sheikh All bin Khalid al-Thani and Bassem Hassan will participate in the 17th leg of Longines Global Champions Tour to be staged in Saint Tropez, France. From today until September 14, the sparkling Longines Athina Onassis Horse Show (LAOHS) will see the world's top horses and riders head to the legendary Pampelonne Beach with its turquoise waters and enviable blue skies. In total, a hundred riders and nearly 200 horses are expected, representing more than twenty nations. The two Qatari riders will also participate in Global Champions League within Doha Falcons team which also includes Michael Whitaker, Jur Vrieling, Bronislav Chudyba and Mike Kawai. (QNA)



SELECTION

England drop Jason Roy for 5th Ashes Test

AFP

London

England have dropped Jason Roy for the fifth Ashes Test against Australia that starts today, as they look to level the series at 2-2.

One-day specialist Roy was handed his Test debut against Ireland in July after making a devastating impact at the top of the order during England's victorious World Cup campaign.

But the Surrey batsman failed to impress in the first four matches of the Ashes, either as an opener or when he dropped down the order in the fourth Test, where he made a top score of 31.

Paceman Craig Overton has also been left out for the clash at the Oval, with all-rounders Sam Curran and Chris Woakes, who made way for Overton at Old Trafford last week, coming into the side.

The England and Wales Cricket Board confirmed that Ben Stokes would play as a specialist batsman due to a shoulder injury.

England need a victory at the Oval to draw the series, although Australia have already retained the Ashes.

Captain Joe Root said Roy had missed out because the side needed re-balancing due to Stokes's injury.

LEFT OUT

"It's always tough to leave guys



England's Jason Roy during nets. (Reuters)

out, but Stokes obviously picked up a shoulder injury in the last game and won't be able to bowl the overs we normally expect him to," he said at the London ground yesterday.

"With that we've had to change the balance of the side, and Jason's the unfortunate one to miss out.

"Jason's had an opportunity to come in and play Test cricket,

get a feel for it and it's not quite gone how he would have liked.

"But I'm sure he'll go away and work extremely hard and come back again and that's what you expect of guys when they get left out." Root said it would have been a risk to pick Stokes as a frontline bowler due to the all-rounder's fitness issues but he fully justified his place as a specialist batsman.

The 28-year-old is England's top-scorer in the series with 354 runs and two centuries, including his match-winning ton in the third Test at Headingley.

"He might be able to bowl a couple of overs here and there but his batting, as this series as shown, is a massive part of our side and he rightly deserves to be in our team as just a batter and a top-four batter," said Root.

"He will I'm sure want to find different ways of getting himself into the game even if it's not with the ball."

ENGLAND SQUAD

Joe Root (capt), Jofra Archer, Jonny Bairstow (wkt), Stuart Broad, Rory Burns, Jos Buttler, Sam Curran, Joe Denly, Jack Leach, Ben Stokes, Chris Woakes.

England's year a success despite missing out on Ashes: Root

Captain **Joe Root** said England's year could still be judged a success even if they fail to level the Ashes series against Australia by winning the final Test at the Oval.

The home side go into fifth and final match 2-1 down, meaning they cannot place the urn in their trophy cabinet alongside the one-day World Cup, which they won for the first time in July. But the skipper said his players were still focused on denying Australia their first series win in England since 2001 in the game starting today.

"It's bitterly disappointing to not have got the Ashes back, but we haven't lost anything yet," he said.

"We've got to make sure that we square the series up and there's Test Championship points to play for as well which down the line could make a huge difference."

Root was adamant that despite the disappointment of failing to win the series, England could still be proud of their achievements over the summer.

"To win the first 50-over World Cup is a huge achievement for English cricket, so, absolutely, it should be seen as a successful year, but we've got a chance to level this series and make

it slightly better than it looks right now so that's the full focus of the group."

England's failure has led to questions over Root's position as captain, particularly given his inconsistent batting throughout the series.

But he said he knew the direction in which he wanted to take the team and was already looking forward to trying to win the Ashes in Australia in 2021/22.

"In terms of personnel, things might change, as they have done for a while," he said.

"But ultimately we need to focus on the core group of players that are going to lead this team forward both home and away and build from that and towards winning in Australia."



Joe Root attends a press conference at The Oval yesterday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

India's selectors face call to solve opening woes

'We will definitely take Rohit as opener point into consideration when we all meet'



The file photo of India's Rohit Sharma in action.

Reuters

Mumbai

Finding a solution to India's top-order batting conundrum will be top of selectors' agenda when they meet to pick the squad for next month's home test series against South Africa.

Despite being the world's top-ranked test side India have struggled with their opening combination, which, in turn, has heaped pressure on the middle order.

Since 2018 KL Rahul, Murali Vijay, Shikhar Dhawan, Parthiv

Patel, Prithvi Shaw, Mayank Agarwal and Hanuma Vihari have all opened in tests but none have been able to cement their spot.

Experienced duo Dhawan and Vijay are not expected to be considered after repeated failures while Prithvi Shaw is currently serving a doping ban.

Rahul has played 36 tests but failed to score a half-century in his last seven matches while his opening partner in West Indies, Mayank Agarwal, has just four tests under his belt.

With Ajinkya Rahane and Vihari putting in solid performances in the middle order in two

tests against the West Indies, Rohit Sharma has had to sit out, prompting calls to try the limited-overs opener at the top of the order in the longest format too.

"As selection committee, we haven't met after the conclusion of the West Indies tour. We will definitely take this (Rohit as opener) point into consideration when we all meet and discuss about it," India's chief selector MSK Prasad told India Today.

"KL is definitely a great talent. Of course, he is going through a bit of a tough time in test cricket and we are definitely concerned about his form. He

needs to spend more time on the wicket and regain his touch and form."

Rohit, 32, has secured his place at the top of the order in the Twenty20 and 50-over formats and finished with the most runs at the recent World Cup in England.

The only player in the world with three double hundreds in one-day internationals, Rohit bats in the middle order in the longest format but has never really flourished on the test stage.

He was dropped following a poor return in South Africa in early 2018 when he scored 78 runs in four innings. He played

two tests in a four-match series in Australia at the end of the year, missing one match with injury and another due to the birth of his child.

Virat Kohli's side should not see too many changes in the rest of the batting order while the bowling unit, which led them to a 2-0 win against the West Indies and to the top of the World Test Championship table with 120 points, should also remain mostly intact.

Vishakhapatnam will host the first test between India and South Africa from October 2 followed by matches at Pune and Ranchi.

FOCUS

Anderson targets Test return in NZ, South Africa tours

Reuters

London

England paceman James Anderson hopes to overcome a calf problem that forced him out of the Ashes series and will aim to return for their tours of New Zealand and South Africa later this year.

The 37-year-old sustained the injury playing for Lancashire in July and managed only four overs in the opening test at Edgbaston before being ruled out of the five-match series.

"I'm just about getting over the disappointment... looking ahead to what I can do in the future," England's top test wicket-taker with 575 victims told Sky Sports.

"I'm definitely hungry and keen to keep playing for England. This summer I have been bowling as well as I ever have. I bowled quite a lot for Lancashire at the start of the season and was in really good form before I got injured at an annoying time."

Anderson is targeting a come-

back in November during the two-match test series in New Zealand, but said he was prepared to wait until the four-test tour of South Africa in December and January.

"I never like looking too far ahead, I just want to get my calf sorted and look to the next series to see if I can get myself fit for New Zealand and if not, then South Africa," Anderson said.

Anderson said he was also considering a vegan diet to prolong his career.

"I'm open-minded... I'm going to try and investigate every possible avenue of what I need to do at my age to keep myself in good shape," he added to British media.



James Anderson.

Sri Lanka to 'reassess' Pakistan tour after security threat

Reuters

Colombo

The Sri Lankan cricket association (SLC) said yesterday it was reassessing the security situation in Pakistan after receiving a warning "of a possible terrorist threat" to its team.

Sri Lanka is scheduled to play three one-day internationals and three Twenty20 international matches in Pakistan between Sept. 27 and Oct. 9 and 10 key Lankan players have already opted out of the series citing security concerns.

SLC, which named weakened ODI and T20I squads for the tour earlier yesterday, said in a statement that it had received the warning from the Prime Minister's Office.

"Sri Lanka Cricket today sought the assistance of the Sri Lankan Government to conduct a 'Reassessment' of the security situation in Pakistan ahead of the National Team's planned tour to Pakistan," SLC said.

"The warning highlights that the Prime Minister's Office has

received reliable information of a possible terrorist threat on the Sri Lankan team while touring Pakistan.

Sri Lanka named Lahiru Thirimanne and Dasun Shanaka its ODI and T20I captains for the tour after incumbents Dimuth Karunaratne and Lasith Malinga decided not to travel. The other players who chose not to play were Angelo Mathews, Niroshan Dickwella, Kusal Perera, Dhananjaya De Silva, Thisara Perera, Akila Dhananjaya, Suranga Lakmal and Dinesh Chandimal. Kusal Mendis was unavailable for selection due to an injury.

Pakistan are looking to host their first test on home soil — as part of the World Test Championship in December — since a 2009 militant attack on Sri Lanka's team bus in Lahore left six security personnel and two civilians dead while six players were injured.

Pakistan did not host international cricket for six years following the 2009 attack, with the team playing their home matches in the United Arab Emirates, but have hosted teams such as Zimbabwe and West Indies in recent years.

EURO 2020 QUALIFIERS

England, France beat minnows, Ronaldo shines for Portugal

Ronaldo, making his 160th international appearance, scored four as Portugal won against Lithuania

AFP
Paris

England and Portugal both scored five goals while France scored three as they overcame lowly-ranked Kosovo, Lithuania and Andorra in Euro 2020 qualifying on Tuesday night. Captain Ronaldo, making his 160th international appearance, scored four as Portugal won 5-1 in Vilnius and strengthened their position in Group B after a sluggish start.

For Ronaldo it was a second hat-trick in three internationals. The victory over Lithuania, 130th in the world rankings, kept brought Portugal five points behind Ukraine at the top of Group B. Portugal, who opened the group with home draws against Ukraine and Serbia, started their recovery with a victory in Belgrade on Saturday. They have a game in hand on all the other teams in the group.

"We were better, we are better, and we won because of it," said Fernando Santos, the Portugal coach. "We kept the pace after the win at Serbia, otherwise this triumph would make no sense, and we are closer."

Ronaldo's first goal was a penalty. The second, with the scores level after an hour, was a scuffed low shot from outside the penalty area which took a couple of strange bounces off the artificial turf before it was parried into the air by the diving Ernestas Setkus.

The dropping ball hit the back of the goalie's head before rolling in. The third was a clinical volley from close range. The fourth was a low shot into the corner. Vytautas Andriuskevicius scored the hosts' only goal before William Carvalho added a fifth for the reigning champions at the end. Serbia beat Luxembourg 3-1, as Aleksandar Mitrovic netted twice, to solidify their grasp on third place. They are a point behind Portugal.

In Southampton, Gareth Southgate's England side trailed early on to Kosovo, ranked 120th in the world, when Valon Berisha scored after 34 seconds.

England replied with a first-half goal bunge that ended with Jadon Sancho scoring twice to make it 5-1 at the break.

The visitors claimed two back in the second half, including a second for Lazio midfielder Berisha, but the 5-3 victory put England three points clear in Group A, ahead of the second-placed Czech Republic, who beat Montenegro 3-0. "A bizarre game," said Southgate. "The outstanding parts of our play were



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo (centre) vies for the ball with Lithuania's Karolis Laukzemis during the Euro 2020 Group B qualification match in Vilnius, Lithuania. (AFP)

obvious. The errors were obvious."

In Paris, the world champions made light work of beating 136-ranked Andorra 3-0. It was Les Bleus' 100th match at the Stade de France. Antoine Griezmann missed a penalty for his country for the second game running but Kingsley Coman, Clement Lenglet, with his first on the international goal, and Wissam Ben Yedder clinched three points. "It is really annoying. I'll just need to keep working. You can't be on

top of your game all the time," Griezmann said. Coman also scored two against Albania on Saturday. "It has been a very good week. It has gone well personally and collectively," Coman said. Cenk Tosun scored twice as the Turks beat Moldova with ease in a 4-0 victory in Chisinau. But Iceland, who had been level with the top two, suffered a blow as they lost 4-2 in Albania. That result meant Iceland dropped three points behind. It also changed the

tiebreak, allowing Turkey to take first place from France.

EURO 2020 QUALIFYING RESULTS

Group A: At Podgorica: Montenegro 0 Czech Republic 3 (Soucek 54, Masopust 58, Darida 90+5-pen); At Southampton, England: England 5 (Sterling 8, Kane, 19, Vojvoda 38-og, Sancho 44, 45+1) Kosovo 3 (Berisha 1, 49, Muriqi 55-pen)
Group B: At Luxembourg: Luxembourg

1 (Turpel 66) Serbia (Mitrovic 36, 78, Radonjic 55); At Vilnius: Lithuania 1 (Andriuskevicius 28) Portugal 5 (Ronaldo 7-pen, 62, 65, 76, Carvalho 90+2)

Group H: At Chisinau: Moldova 0 Turkey 4 (Tosun 37, 79, Turuc 57, Yazici 88); At Saint-Denis, France: France 3 (Coman 18, Lenglet 52, Ben Yedder 90+1) Andorra 0;

At Elbasan, Albania: Albania 4 (Dermaku 3, Hysaj 52, Roshi 79, Cikalleshi 83) Iceland 2 (G. Sigurdsson 47, Sigthorsson 58)

Marseille star Thauvin set for long absence with ankle injury

Marseille: Marseille's World Cup-winning winger Florian Thauvin is set to miss the rest of the calendar year after agreeing to undergo ankle surgery, his club announced. In a statement, Marseille said Thauvin would not play again until after Ligue 1's winter break, which covers the period of late December and early January.

Thauvin, who has won 10 caps for France including one appearance as a substitute during their triumphant World Cup campaign in Russia last year, initially suffered the injury late last season. He then twisted his ankle in a pre-season friendly defeat to Rangers in July but returned to action for Andre Villas-Boas's side on September 1. Despite that, Marseille said he would now undergo an arthroscopy "in order to be able to get back to 100 percent".

Thauvin has scored 53 league goals in the last three seasons for his club, who are hoping Villas-Boas can revive their fortunes after they missed out on European qualification at the end of last season.

TURKISH COURT SENTENCES BARCA'S TURAN TO JAIL

Barcelona midfielder Arda Turan, currently on loan with Turkish club Basaksehir, was sentenced to two years and eight months in jail for firing a gun to cause fear and panic, illegal possession of weapons and intentional injury.

However, the court deferred the implementation of the verdict, which means Turan will not go to prison unless he commits a crime in the next five years. Turan was involved in a fight with Turkish singer Berkay Sahin in an Istanbul nightclub late last year, leaving the singer with a broken nose. Turan later arrived at the hospital with a gun which he fired at the ground, causing panic. Basaksehir said they had fined the 31-year-old 2.5mn Turkish lira (\$432,548) over the incident.

CURACAO GOALKEEPER PIETER DIES AGED 31

The Curacao team played a CONCACAF Nations League match against Haiti with heavy hearts on Tuesday following the sudden death of their goalkeeper, Jarzinho Pieter. Pieter, 31, died at the Curacao team hotel in Port-au-Prince on Monday.

Multiple media outlets reported the cause of death was an apparent heart attack. Pieter made a dozen appearances for the small Caribbean island nation from 2013 through this year. Curacao drew the match with Haiti 1-1.

FRIENDLY

Abram strikes late as Peru down Brazil

AFP
Los Angeles

Peru grabbed a slice of revenge for their loss to Brazil in the Copa America final on Tuesday, defeating the five-time World Cup winners 1-0 in a friendly in Los Angeles. A headed goal from Argentina-based defender Luis Abram was enough to give Peru a hard-fought win over the Brazilians. Brazil, who defeated Peru 3-1 in the final of the Copa America in Rio de Janeiro in July, never got going to the disappointment of a 32,287 crowd at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. The defeat brought an end to Brazil's 17-game winning streak, a run which started with a victory over the United States just over a year ago.

Brazil coach Tite meanwhile opted against starting Paris Saint-Germain star Neymar, four days after he had made a successful return from injury with a goal and an assist in a 2-2 draw with Colombia on Friday. Tite, who had been reluctant to start Neymar in back-to-back games as the striker regains fitness, brought on the PSG forward after 63 minutes in place of Liverpool's Roberto Firmino.

Neymar attempted to up the tempo in attack, but was unable to break the deadlock, with Brazil, who were also missing Dani Alves and Thiago Silva, struggling to find their usual attacking rhythm. Instead it was Peru who grabbed a winner, Abram rising to meet Yoshimar Yotun's free-kick to glance in the winner.

MARTINEZ HAT-TRICK FIRES ARGENTINA OVER MEXICO
Lautaro Martinez fired a 22-minute hat-



Peru's Luis Abram (right) celebrates with teammates Christofer Gonzales (left) and Andre Carrillo after scoring against Brazil in a friendly in Los Angeles. (AFP)

trick as Argentina thrashed Mexico 4-0 in a friendly international in San Antonio on Tuesday. Inter Milan striker Martinez scored in the 17th, 22nd and 39th minutes at the Alamodome to give Argentina a deserved win over a lacklustre Mexico team.

Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Leandro Paredes scored Argentina's other goal from the penalty spot after 33 minutes as the South American giants romped into a 4-0 lead at halftime. But it was the 22-year-old Martinez who grabbed the headlines with a clinical exhibition of fin-

ishing which took his international goals tally to nine in 13 appearances.

Martinez opened the scoring in the 17th minute, picking the ball up deep in Mexican territory before twisting and turning past several defenders and firing low past Guillermo Ochoa. Martinez bagged his second five minutes later, with River Plate's Exequiel Palacios punishing sloppy play in the Mexican defence to send the Inter Milan striker through on goal to finish for 2-0.

A disastrous start for Mexico got worse

shortly after the half hour mark when Carlos Salcedo was adjudged to have handled in the area to concede a penalty. Paredes duly stepped up to convert to give Argentina a 3-0 lead. Martinez completed his hat-trick six minutes from half-time, again capitalising on lackadaisical Mexican defending to dart in and shoot past Ochoa.

Argentina were without several first choice regulars, with Lionel Messi, Sergio Aguero and Angel Di Maria all missing from their two-game international tour of North America.

Meanwhile, the United States halted their two-game losing streak after Jordan Morris's second-half goal was enough to secure a 1-1 draw with Uruguay in a friendly international in St. Louis on Tuesday.

Gregg Berhalter's side had been looking to bounce back after being comprehensively outplayed in a 3-0 loss to Mexico in New Jersey last Friday.

However the USA struggled to make much an impression against an under-strength Uruguay in humid conditions at Busch Stadium, better known as the home of baseball's St. Louis Cardinals. Uruguay, missing star strikers Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani, were barely troubled by the USA in the first half.

Uruguay took the lead five minutes after the restart, when a lightning counter-attack culminated with Los Angeles FC star Brian Rodriguez turning Aaron Long inside out before rifling home past Guzan.

The USA kept plugging away in search of an equaliser and finally got their reward in the 79th minute, when Nick Lima's bizarre deflected cross fell into the path of Morris at the farpost who steered the ball home with his chest.

FOCUS

City to build statue in honour of Kompany

AFP
London

Manchester City will honour former captain Vincent Kompany with a statue of the Belgian outside the club's Etihad stadium. Kompany was missing playing in his City testimonial late last night due to a hamstring injury, but was in attendance as the club also named a road at their training base after the centre-back.

"The road connecting the City Football Academy youth and community pitches with the Club's First Team Centre has been renamed 'Vincent Kompany Crescent' and is marked by a mosaic inspired by Vincent's unforgettable goal-celebration in the 2012 Manchester derby," City said in a statement.

Kompany had been due to feature in the star-studded charity match that will see a City legends team face an all-star XI of former Premier League players to raise money for his homelessness charity Tackle4MCR.

The 33-year-old left the Premier League champions in May to become player-manager at Anderlecht and, much like the latter half of his City career, was hit by a muscle injury in defeat to Genk last month.

"Unfortunately I can't start or



even play. I have a slight hamstring injury and can't risk it. It's typical me," said Kompany.

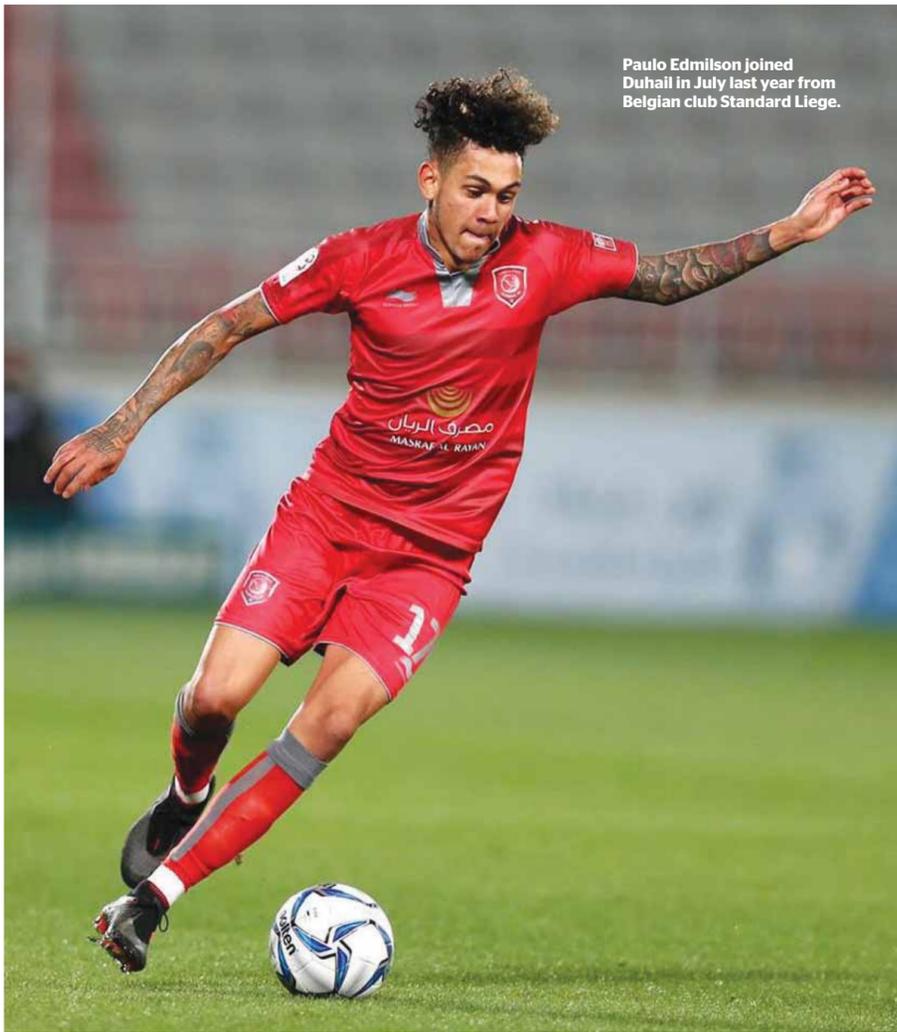
However, the Belgian international played down his frustration at missing out with the most important goal raising funds for charity. Current City stars David Silva and Sergio Aguero will line up alongside the likes of Mario Balotelli in a team managed by Pep Guardiola.

They will face an all-star side littered with former Manchester United greats like Edwin van der Sar, Gary Neville, Paul Scholes and Ryan Giggs, but also boasting Thierry Henry and Robin van Persie in attack.

QNB STARS LEAGUE

Won't be an easy game against Rayyan, says Duhail star Edmilson

'Al Duhail's performance can rise to great heights when we play with high spirit'



Paulo Edmilson joined Duhail in July last year from Belgian club Standard Liege.

Paulo Edmilson has a key role to play in Al Duhail's scheme of things this season, mainly because of his untiring efforts, high technical abilities, skills in dribbling, passing as well as creating opportunities and scoring.

The Belgian-Brazilian joined Duhail in July last year from his home club Standard Liege and since then has been the standout player in Portuguese coach Rui Faria's team. The forward spoke to *qsl.qa* ahead of this weekend's QNB Stars League match against Al Rayyan. Excerpts

How do you view your match against Al Rayyan?

Certainly, it won't be an easy game. Al Rayyan are a big team in the Qatar league and are working hard to win the title. I think fans will enjoy a strong performance. It'll be a good game because both teams play offensively.

Will Duhail be able to win it or will you face difficulties during the match?

Difficulties exist in every game, but the ability to win comes from the players' determination and successful implementation of the plan drawn up by the technical staff as well as performance on the pitch. All these factors can help Al Duhail win this contest. If we can give our maximum, we'll be able to defeat Al Rayyan.

What are the strengths of both teams?

Both teams have good players in all departments and that reflects on their strength. Al Duhail's performance can rise to great heights when we play with high spirit. Al Rayyan players have high physical capabilities, which are reflected on their speed on the pitch.

Which Al Rayyan player worries you the most?

I'm not worried about any particular player. Generally, we've to be wary of our opponents. There've been talks that Al Duhail's performance is on the decline...

Injuries have forced many of our play-

ers to be out of action. Certainly, this has had a big impact on us. Teams missing the services of their regular players happens around the world. It's normal in football. We work hard to win games. We all perform strongly in training in order to fulfil our mission on the pitch.

What do you think are the reasons for changes in the team's show?

I don't think there's a change in the team's performance, but we can say there's a mismatch in some games.

Is exit from the AFC Champions League still haunting Al Duhail?

Exiting from the AFC Champions League was sad for all of us, but this is football and we must move forward. There're many tournaments ahead of us. We must be on top physically and technically to achieve our goals.

Al Rayyan are motivated to score their first win after two successive draws...

Every club wants victories and positive results. Al Duhail are motivated enough to win this game.

Your message to Al Duhail and Al Rayyan fans?

We hope there'll be a lot of fans out there and that'll increase the players' determination on the pitch. It'll also encourage them to give off their best to delight the fans.

What're your ambitions with the team this season?

Any footballer will've ambitions to win trophies with his club and give the performance expected from him. Now we're facing a new season, new challenges and we must work hard to regain our pride on the domestic front and also in Asia.

Are Duhail capable of regaining the league shield?

Indeed, Al Duhail are capable of regaining the league shield. It can be achieved by working more on the pitch and rectifying our mistakes that affect our performance. The season is still long and we're at the beginning of the journey.

Two arrested in transfer fraud raids

Brussels: Police investigating suspected fraud linked to the transfer of Serbian striker Aleksandar Mitrovic to Newcastle United have made seven raids in Belgium, Monaco and London, arresting two people including an agent, officials said yesterday.

The probe, which earlier this year saw the Belgian FA headquarters searched, is looking into suspected money-laundering related to transfers including Mitrovic's 18.5mn euro (13mn pound) move from Anderlecht to St James' Park in 2015.

Under the direction of a Belgian anti-corruption judge, police and tax officials made seven raids on Tuesday and Wednesday, detaining an agent in Monaco and his assistant in the Belgian city of Liege.

The initial stage of the probe, concentrating on Mitrovic's move, led to a series of raids in April but no arrests and investigators are now focusing on agent Christophe Henrotay.

Henrotay is the man who was held in Monaco in the latest round of raids. A source close to the inquiry said he is suspected of taking illegal kickbacks in connection with another transfer. He is one of the top football agents in Belgium, with clients including Real Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and Belgian national team winger Yannick Carrasco.

Four of this week's raids were in Monaco, two in Belgium and one in London, with the cooperation of the Metropolitan Police and British customs and revenue officers. The inquiry is separate from Belgium's so-called "football-gate" scandal, which has resulted in 20 suspects being charged since October 2018, including agents, referees and club officials, in a vast investigation into fraud and match-fixing. Mitrovic spent three seasons at Newcastle before moving to Fulham in 2018. His transfer from Anderlecht - Belgium's most successful club - involved the agents Pini Zahavi and Fali Ramadani, the *Derniere Heure* newspaper reported at the time of the initial raids in April. The criminal probe adds to Anderlecht's woes on the pitch, where the 34-time Belgian champions are languishing a lowly 13th in the league with just a single win in their first six games this season.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar 2022 training sites showcase legacy value three years ahead of tournament



Each training facility for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 will consist of two FIFA-compliant floodlit natural grass pitches, ancillary team facilities, team parking and spectator areas for public training sessions.

Qatar 2022's compact configuration allows for the introduction of a new innovative accommodation and training concept, providing team delegations with a home-away-from-home for the duration of the tournament - the purpose-built Team Base Camp (TBC) featuring dedicated training sites for each team.

The 41 training sites for the teams that will participate in the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 are already showcasing their legacy value, with pilot usage phase well underway ahead of the official launch.

Several national teams including the Algerian team that won the African Cup of Nations in July have already used the sites. The sites also will be used before the 2019 FIFA Club World Cup in December.

Each training facility for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 will consist of two FIFA-compliant floodlit natural grass pitches,

ancillary team facilities, team parking and spectator areas for public training sessions.

Ahmed al-Obaidly, Training Sites Project Manager at the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC), explained: "Each training site has two natural grass pitches with a three metre auxiliary area around and a five metre gap between the pitches to guarantee the safety of the players."

He added: "The field of play in the training sites resembles the pitches at FIFA World Cup stadiums with same type and quality of playing surface, profile, irrigation and drainage system. These can be used any time of the day during the tournament as they are equipped with floodlighting to light up the entire site evenly."

The training facilities are an important pillar of the team base camps, a mandatory FIFA World Cup hosting concept which includes training facilities and a hotel located in close proximity to each other. Each of the

participating teams have their own team base camps during the FIFA World Cup.

Al-Obaidly emphasised that the three years leading up to the tournament will give the SC plenty of time to pilot different uses for the training sites and ultimately highlight the legacy use of this state-of-the-art sporting infrastructure.

Teams that have already used the pitches include the Qatar national team, Taipei, Iran, Palestine, Kazakhstan, the Qatar Rugby Federation and Al Fohood Sports Academy from Oman. Some of the chosen locations include Qatar University, Doha Golf Course, Al Saliya and Onaiza, with public sports grounds included in the legacy planning for the facilities.

The extensive infrastructure at each site also includes dressing rooms, a press conference area, a catering and lounge area, information technology and communications networks and broadcast and media facilities.

LA LIGA

Valencia sack Marcelino, name Celades as new coach

By Sid Lowe
The Guardian

Chelsea's Champions League opponents Valencia have been thrown into chaos after the club's owner, Peter Lim, announced the sacking of Marcelino Garcia Toral six days before their visit to Stamford Bridge.

Marcelino has been replaced by the former Spain Under-21s manager Albert Celades, after a crisis that has been growing steadily over the last year and was played out publicly during the summer finally exploded yesterday. Valencia face Barcelona at the Camp Nou on Saturday night before travelling to London.

Lim summoned the club's president, Anil Murthy, to Singapore in order to fire the manager. Marcelino did not know about the meeting until reports appeared in the media on Wednesday morning and the official announcement was made in the afternoon. The club's director general, Mateu Alemany, remains in his post for the time being, although his long-term position appears untenable. The players are understood to be shocked by the decision, but they knew that this was likely sooner or later.

Marcelino has been credited with bringing stability back to Valencia, a club with a propensity for infighting and crisis. He led them to a Champions League place last season and to a Copa del Rey final victory over Barcelona in Seville - their first trophy for 11 years, and in their centenary season. But his relationship with the club's owner had be-



Marcelino won the Copa del Rey last season and his last match in charge of Valencia was a 2-0 home win against Mallorca.

come unbearably strained. That was not helped by the very fact that he and Alemany were seen as the architects of the success, rather than the owner - or in spite of the owner, in fact.

Lim bought Valencia five years ago, and has signed 52 players since. Celades will be his eighth manager, with Salvador Gonzalez "Voro" having had three different spells in charge. Questions have been raised over Lim's motives for owning the club and his commitment from Singapore as well as the role played by the agent Jorge Mendes. Marcelino arrived in July 2017, employed by Alemany, who had joined the club in March that year. Murthy took over as president in July. It was a significant turnaround for Valencia. A new structure appeared to be set up with Alemany and Marcelino constructing the squad and tranquility at last.

But over the last few months a barely concealed battle for con-

trol had become evident, with an open breakdown in relations between manager, general manager and owner. Marcelino had been publicly critical of the construction of the squad and the club's failure to sign off on players for whom deals had been set up, particularly the Barcelona midfielder Rafinha. He also opposed the proposed sale of striker Rodrigo Moreno, whom Lim sought to sell to Atletico Madrid. That deal, like the relationship, eventually collapsed.

Marcelino had the backing of supporters and both he and Alemany had threatened to walk away during the summer. That crisis was contained, continuity secured, but not for long. Marcelino's press conferences were ever more challenging, his messages direct. At times he appeared to be almost daring the owner to take him on and sack him. At some point he was bound to do just that.

FOCUS

30 days to go before ANOC World Beach Games begin

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The countdown is on: exactly 30 days from today, the maiden edition of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) World Beach Games, also known as Qatar 2019, will kick off with a spectacular opening ceremony at the Beach side of the Katara - the Cultural Village in Doha.

When ANOC announced Qatar as the new host of the inaugural edition of the ANOC World Beach Games on 14th June 2019, the global sports body was not just naming a host in Qatar but also reiterating what has become a widely acknowledged attribute of this sport-loving country as one that can put up a dazzling first-class global event even at short notices.

Ahead of the Games, ANOC and the host country have launched a series of initiatives in a bid to ensure the competition leaves an enduring legacy.

Qatar Olympic Committee



QOC Secretary-General Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain

(QOC) Secretary-General Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain said, "We are happy to start the 30-day countdown to this historical event in Qatar. With the hosting of the World Beach Games Qatar 2019, we are once again demonstrating our readiness to host another world-class event even at short notices. Preparations are in top gear and we can't wait enough to welcome the world to Doha. We believe Qatar 2019 will

set a great benchmark for future events.

A new website (www.awbgqatar.com) which provides, among many other functions, the live streaming of competitions in order to enable fans enjoy live action of the Games from any part of the world was recently launched. The website also includes information about participating countries, venues, provisional competition sched-

ule, news and photo galleries, weather and other relevant information.

ANOC has also unveiled new Instagram (@awbg2019) and Twitter (@AWBG2019) specifically dedicated to the Games. Through the social media accounts, fans will have the opportunity of accessing real-time information as well as being a part of the Games through their interaction and participation.

Capturing the spirit of the Games is 'Dolphy', the fun-loving mascot who is a jolly fellow and a great swimmer who loves the ocean and the warmth of the beach offers.

Dolphy, who loves talking to people and telling them how important it is to keep the water clean, not only for the dolphins, but also for all the other friends in the sea and for the people of Qatar and everywhere.

Commenting on the occasion, Sheikha Asma al-Thani, Director of Marketing and Ceremonies for Qatar 2019, said, "We are happy to unveil Dolphy as the official mascot of the Games. Dolphy fully embodies the spirit of



Qatar 2019 as the Games promises to be not just a competition, but an event designed to provide unparalleled entertainments and fun for the entire family. By nature, dolphins exhibit temperaments that are associated with kindness and peace and they are driven to make those around them happy by creating an ambient tranquil atmosphere of peace and acceptance. These attributes resonate well with us in

Qatar and we believe all participants will leave here with lasting memories of this historical event and our great hospitality as well."

Qatar 2019, which will see more than 1,200 athletes competing in 14 disciplines across 13 sports, will take place at venues including Katara Beach, Al Gharafa, Aspire Park and Ritz Carlton Canal and will witness the participation of a total of 97 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) in what promises to be a truly global festival of beach, water and action sports.

All five continents will be represented at Qatar 2019 with 17 NOCs qualified from Africa, 19 from Americas, 21 from Asia, 35 from Europe and 5 from Oceania.

The qualification process for the ANOC World Beach Games began in June last year with each sport having a different qualification pathway but the majority of qualification places were drawn from world ranking places or the highest finishing places at World Championships or Continental Championships.

The process was designed

to ensure that the best athletes would be competing at the Games.

The featuring sports include aquathlon, 3X3 basketball, climbing bouldering, beach handball, karate kata individual, kitefoil racing, skateboarding, beach soccer, open water 5km swimming, beach tennis, beach volleyball 4X4, waterski, wakeboard and beach wrestling.

As per the schedule, aquathlon, 3X3 basketball, karate kata individual, kitefoil racing, beach soccer, open water 5km swimming, beach tennis and beach wrestling will all take place at Katara Beach while Al Gharafa will be the venue for beach handball and beach volleyball 4X4.

Climbing bouldering and skateboarding, on the other hand, will be hosted at Aspire Park and Ritz-Carlton Canal will take care of the waterski and wakeboard events.

ANOC World Beach Games is scheduled for five days, October 12-16, 2019, with the opening rounds for certain events being held on October 11, 2019.

MLB

Seager shines as Dodgers clinch 7th straight NL West title

'We are glad to get this out of the way. We will have fun tonight and come back to work tomorrow'



Los Angeles Dodgers shortstop Corey Seager hits a home run in the first inning against the Baltimore Orioles at Oriole Park at Camden Yards. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

AFP
Baltimore

Corey Seager blasted two home runs and finished with five RBIs as the Los Angeles Dodgers clinched their seventh straight National League West title with a 7-3 win over the Baltimore Orioles on Tuesday.

"This feels great. It never gets old," said Seager. The Dodgers, who have reached the last two World Series, are seeking their first World Series title since 1988.

Los Angeles lost to the Boston Red Sox in five games last year and lost to the Houston Astros in seven in 2017.

"I just think after losing your first World Series, you probably got a little bit of a hangover coming into it," pitcher Clayton Kershaw said. "After '18, I think we came in a little bit more determined, maybe a little more focused."

Seager smacked two homers in the first three innings and also scored two runs for the Dodgers who celebrated with champagne in the clubhouse.

Seager said the festivities won't last long as they have their sights on the bigger prize. "We are glad to get this out of the

RESULTS

Dodgers	7-3	Orioles
Brewers	4-3	Marlins
Padres	9-8	Cubs
Indians	8-0	Angels
Mets	3-2	D'backs
Phillies	6-5	Braves
Twins	5-0	Nationals
Rays	5-3	Rangers
Tigers	12-11	Yankees
Athletics	21-7	Astros
Blue Jays	4-3	Red Sox
Rockies	2-1	Cardinals
White Sox	7-3	Royals
Giants	5-4	Pirates
Mariners	4-3	Reds

way," he said. "We will have fun tonight and come back to work tomorrow."

Seager hit a three-run homer in the first inning and belted a two-run shot in the third as the Dodgers took a big early lead and cruised from there in front of a crowd of just 12,000 at Camden Yards. He hit both homers off of Baltimore starting

pitcher Ty Blach. Gavin Lux hit his first major league homer in the fifth inning as the Dodgers scored six of their seven runs from homers. Starting pitcher Walker Buehler got the victory with a dominant performance to improve to 13-3 on the season. The right-hander fanned 11 batters and allowed just four hits in seven shutout innings. "It was really special," manager Dave Roberts said. "We needed it, and I think that he needed it."

Baltimore is mired in a six-game losing streak and are just two losses away from losing 100 games for the second consecutive season.

Orioles' pitcher Blach is no stranger to the Dodgers having played previously with the San Francisco Giants. But Blach has struggled since joining the Orioles and on Tuesday he gave up four runs in the first inning. He lasted just 2 1/3 innings, allowing six runs on nine hits.

PADRES DEFEAT CUBS ON WALK-OFF WALK IN 10TH

Manuel Margot drew a four-pitch, walk-off walk from Chicago Cubs reliever Steve Cishek with one out in the 10th inning Tuesday night to give the host San Diego Padres a 9-8 victory.

The Padres held leads of 6-2 and 8-5, but the Cubs rallied to tie the game in the eighth on the second homers of the game by both Kris Bryant and Jason Heyward.

Cishek retired the first hitter he faced in the 10th before giving up an infield single to Luis Urias. Cishek (3-6) then issued walks to Austin Hedges and Travis Jankowski to load the bases before failing to throw a strike to Margot.

Reliever Michel Baez (1-1) picked up his first major league win for the Padres.

The loss cut the Cubs' lead over Milwaukee to one game in the race for the National League's second wild card.

The Cubs tied the game at 8-8 in the top of the eighth as Bryant and Heyward went deep off 20-year-old reliever Andres Munoz. With the Cubs trailing 8-5, Anthony Rizzo opened the inning with a single. Bryant, who received a cortisone injection in his knee Monday, drove a 100 mph fastball 403 feet to left-center, giving the University of San Diego graduate his third and fourth RBIs of the game. Heyward hit his game-tying, 21st homer of the season two hitters later. The Cubs took a 2-0 lead in the second on Heyward's two-run shot into the seats just beyond the leap of Padres left fielder Nick Martini.

NFL

Winless Panthers, Buccaneers collide on short week

Reuters
New York

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Carolina Panthers had similar outlooks after one game. Just get better - and do it in a hurry.

The teams have a short turnaround for Week 2 when they face off tonight at Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte, North Carolina.

"We just got to play better," Panthers tight end Greg Olsen said. "It doesn't take a lot of football knowledge to understand a lot of things we did (in the opener) are hard to overcome."

The Buccaneers had plenty of self-inflicted problems in a disturbing home loss to the San Francisco 49ers.

"Learn from what you did, get it corrected," said coach Bruce Arians, who's in search of his first victory with Tampa Bay. "Week 1 or Week 10, it's about the next one. ... This is a quick turnaround, so it kind of helps mentally. We get right into our game plan."

The Buccaneers want to avoid a downward spiral, and there's not time to lament the shortcomings in the opener.

"I guess the good thing is we're playing on Thursday," Tampa Bay tight end Cameron Brate said. Carolina came closer in a 30-27 setback to the Los Angeles Rams, the reigning NFC champions.

"We just need to clean some stuff up," Panthers linebacker Luke Kuechly said.

Two of Tampa Bay quarterback Jameis Winston's three interceptions against San Francisco were returned for touchdowns in the 31-17 loss.

"We've got to eliminate those type of plays or we won't beat anybody," Arians said.

Panthers quarterback Cam Newton, who like Winston

is a former Heisman Trophy winner, had a rather uneven performance in the first game. He's bound to be ready for this challenge.

"Cam is a prime-time player, so we're going to get his best," Arians said.

Containing Carolina running back Christian McCaffrey will be one of the priorities for Tampa Bay. He racked up 209 yards from scrimmage (128 on the ground, 81 receiving) for the sixth-most in NFL in a season opener in the past 20 years.

Otherwise, the Panthers will look to fix numerous areas.

"We just have to get that edge back," Newton said.

The Buccaneers had trouble converting on some of their chances. The red zone offense is in need of immediate attention. "We can do a better job running routes, especially the deep stuff," Arians said.

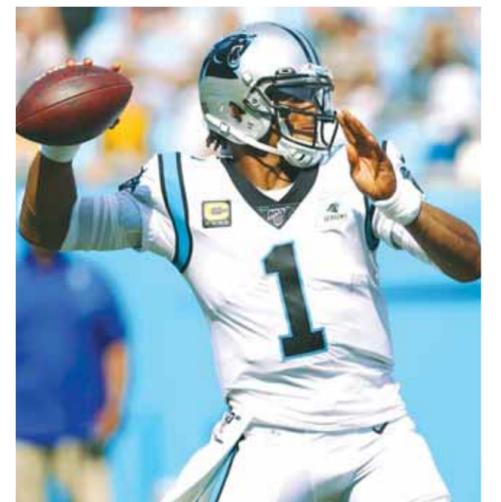
Tampa Bay offensive tackle Donovan Smith said the Buccaneers can't be easing into the early part of season. "We've just got to stop beating ourselves," Smith said.

Both teams came out of their openers in relatively good health, though Olsen missed Tuesday's practice with an ailing back. He's likely to play Thursday.

Carolina defensive tackle Gerald McCoy, who played his first nine seasons with Tampa Bay before joining the Panthers in the offseason, will be facing his former team.

Until New Orleans' last-play victory against Houston on Monday night, every NFC South team lost its opener. This will be the first intra-divisional game for any of the four teams.

Carolina has won nine of its last 12 meetings with the Buccaneers. These teams will play twice in about a month's time, with the rematch October 13 in London.



Carolina Panthers quarterback Cam Newton looks to pass during the fourth quarter against the Los Angeles Rams at Bank of America Stadium on September 8. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

RUGBY

'No excuses' – All Blacks relish Boks World Cup test

Treble-chasing All Blacks began their workout at 8am to avoid brutal afternoon heat



New Zealand players warm up during a training session at Kashiwanoha Park Stadium in Kashiwa, Chiba prefecture, Japan yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Kashiwa, Japan

Champions New Zealand underwent a punishing first World Cup training session in Japan yesterday before promising to come out firing against South Africa in their blockbuster tournament opener. The treble-chasing All Blacks, who face the Springboks in a potentially explosive Pool B clash on September 21, began their workout at 8am local time in Kashiwa, northeast of Tokyo, to avoid the brutal afternoon heat.

"I'll give you a quick summary – it's very hot," said New Zealand assistant coach Ian Foster, noting that temperatures hit 38 Celsius (100 Fahrenheit) on Tuesday. "We changed the timing of our

training just to adapt to the heat in the afternoon. It's common sense – but we're loving it.

"We had a number of players who we held back last week with niggles. We're pleased with the progress we've seen and that's put us in a good spot," he added, confirming that fly-half Richie Mo'unga should recover from his sore shoulder in time to face South Africa.

"It's the first time in three years we've had a week of training without a game at the end. That's probably why we got a bit of a bounce today with a really solid session. The guys are feeling really good about what we're doing."

The All Blacks, who smashed Tonga 92-7 last weekend in a World Cup warm-up in Hamilton, also meet Italy, Canada and Namibia in Pool B. But their showdown with the Springboks, who held the

All Blacks 16-16 in Wellington six weeks ago and beat them to the Rugby Championship title, is set to be a classic and could set the tone for the World Cup.

"We love the draw because it's meant we've turned up and there's no excuses, no waiting for us to get used to the intensity – it's right there in front of us," insisted Foster. "We're about to face a very confident South African team, but they're going to face a very determined All Blacks team – we know South Africa are going to be 100% prepared and we've got to make sure we are too."

The Springboks limbered up for the World Cup by beating hosts Japan 41-7 in Kumagaya last Friday to partially atone for their humiliating loss to the Brave Blossoms at the 2015 tournament.

But Foster paid tribute to Japan, who kick off the World Cup against Russia in

Tokyo on September 20.

"I think we saw a very brave Japan team play with a lot of possession," he said. "They really challenged South Africa defensively for large periods of the game."

Foster meanwhile shrugged off suggestions that New Zealand were showing glimpses of fallibility, after drawing with the Boks and losing to Australia in the Rugby Championship.

"Winning has always been important to us, but it really doesn't mean much now," he said, adding:

"There's a number of candidates putting their hands up to be favourites for this tournament. We've seen a number of teams who've had big victories that we've looked at and gone 'Wow, that's a team that could really threaten!' So it's going to be an exciting World Cup – but the rest is just a smokescreen really."

FOCUS

Italy's Parisse dares to dream in World Cup swansong

Reuters
Rome

On Oct. 11, 2003, the attention of the rugby world was fixed on New Zealand's first step in their bid to win the Rugby World Cup, a 70-7 victory over Italy in Melbourne. Just over an hour into a routine win for the All Blacks, a 20-year-old Italian called Sergio Parisse stepped off the bench to replace flanker Mauro Bergamasco for his World Cup debut.

Although the substitution did little to influence the game, it started a remarkable international career during which Parisse has become his country's most-capped player. Fourteen years on, the number eight is set to play in a fifth World Cup in Japan, a landmark only two players have previously reached – Samoa's Brian Lima and Bergamasco, the man he replaced on his debut. "When you're 20 years old your dream is to go to the World Cup, so you want to kill everyone in every single training session," Parisse said. The 35-year-old has achieved a lot since first realising that dream.

He has earned 140 caps – more than any except Ireland's Brian O'Driscoll (141) and New Zealand's Richie McCaw (149). In that time the 6ft 4in back-row forward's unique blend of power and technique has made him an Italian talisman and he became the first player from his country to be nominated for IRB Player of the Year in 2008 before earning a second nomination in 2013.

Parisse's stature and role as captain ensured his ticket to Japan was never in doubt, although he insists the security of a squad place hasn't tempted him to ease off a bit ahead of his final appearance on rugby's biggest stage.

"My desire is stronger than before," he said. "There's no way for me to be lazy or relaxed in training just because I know I'm the captain and I'm going to be there in Japan. It's my responsibility to be the first at training, to be aggressive. I say to the team every time we train that

we're friends, we play together, but when we're training we're not friends and we don't give gifts to anyone. There's no way that there is less commitment in training just because I'm 35 years old and pretty sure to go to the World Cup."

Parisse describes himself as "very passionate and emotional". He was reduced to tears in the news conference that followed Italy's loss to France on the final day of the 2019 Six Nations, which extended their losing run in the competition to a record 22 games.

There's no escaping the fact this will be the last time he graces a World Cup. But Parisse is determined not to allow the thought of his final game at the tournament – and possibly his last for Italy – to distract him. "I just want to enjoy it, because I know these are my last few games in an Italian jersey," he said.

"I'm trying to enjoy every time I pull it on and go out to represent my country," he said. "We're going to see after the World Cup if I'm going to stop my (international) career or continue. If I feel I can still give something to the Italian jersey I would consider another Six Nations, but if I think after the World Cup that I should stop I'm going to be honest and that's the best call," he added. "In my head I want to play for Italy for another 10 or 15 years but it's impossible, so sometimes you have to think about making the right decision."

Italy face an enormous challenge to reach the knockout stages for the first time after being drawn in a group with two of the tournament favourites, New Zealand and South Africa, as well as Namibia and Canada. But Parisse believes the attitude and preparation of Conor O'Shea's squad have put them in the best possible position to pull off a momentous upset. "I've never been in a World Cup squad with as much enthusiasm as this one before," he said. "In 2015 we had players with a lot of talent and skill like Martin Castrogiovanni, Andrea Masi, Mauro Bergamasco, players with experience of another level, and in 2011 it was the same.



Italy's Sergio Parisse. (Reuters)

WALLABIES' KURIDRANI ON TRACK FOR FIJI, PETAIA STILL WEEKS AWAY

Tokyo: Tevita Kuridrani is on track to be fit for Australia's Rugby World Cup opener against Fiji but fellow centre Jordan Petaia may not be available until their third group match against Uruguay, coach Michael Cheika said yesterday. Both players are battling hamstring strains but Petaia's injury needed a longer recovery and could see the uncapped teenager ruled out of the second match against Pool D

rivals Wales, Cheika said at training in Odawara, Japan. "I think Tevita is running nearly back at full pace so I'm hopeful he's going to be right for selection next weekend," Cheika said. "Our target for Jordan is a couple of weeks later. If not Wales, the one after but we're hopeful it will be for Wales."

Twice World Cup winners Australia play Fiji in Sapporo on Sept. 21 before meeting Wales in Tokyo eight days

later and Uruguay on Oct. 5. They play their last group match against Georgia on Oct. 11. Fiji-born Kuridrani and Petaia were sidelined for the Wallabies' last World Cup warm-up, a hard-fought 34-15 win over Samoa in Sydney on Saturday.

Veteran Adam Ashley-Cooper started outside utility Matt Toomua in the centres against the Samoans but Cheika is likely to have James

O'Connor and Samu Kerevi in his starting midfield against Fiji. O'Connor and Kerevi proved an effective combination in the upset of world champions New Zealand in Perth last month. Lock Adam Coleman, who scored the first of six tries by the Wallabies against Samoa, was spared full training in Japan while recovering from a thumb injury but Cheika expected him to be fit for Fiji. After arriving late on Monday due

to Typhoon Faxai, the Wallabies held an open training session on Wednesday at their Odawara base where local media were curious to know how they were coping with the humidity.

RITCHIE CLEARED TO JOIN SCOTLAND SQUAD IN JAPAN

Edinburgh flanker Jamie Ritchie will be laterally join Scotland's World Cup squad in Japan after recovering from a facial

injury. The 23-year-old stayed behind when his team-mates flew to the far east on Monday after sustaining a deep wound to his face during last Friday's 36-9 final warm-up win over Georgia at Murrayfield.

Ritchie underwent further specialist assessment but the Scottish Rugby Union says he is fit enough to travel and will join the rest of the squad at their training camp in Nagasaki today.

OLYMPICS

South Korea asks IOC to ban Japan's use of 'Rising Sun' flag at Olympics

Reuters
Seoul

South Korea has asked the International Olympic Committee to bar Japan from using the "Rising Sun" flag at next year's Games, Seoul's sports ministry said yesterday, as the Asian neighbours engage in an ever more rancorous feud over history and trade. Relations between the neighbours are arguably at their lowest ebb since they normalised ties in 1965, strained over the issue of South Korean forced labour during Japan's 1910-45 occupation.

South Korea's sports ministry said it sent a letter to the IOC yesterday to express its "disappointment" over

Tokyo's organising committee's decision to allow the flag to be displayed at Olympic venues and call for action to thwart the move.

The ministry said the flag defies the peaceful spirit of the Olympics as it was a symbol of Japan's imperialist past that reminds Asian countries of "historical wounds and pains," and it likened it to the swastika used in Nazi Germany.

The International Olympic Committee confirmed it had received the letter. "As the IOC has said from the outset of this discussion, sports stadiums should be free of any political demonstration," an IOC official said. "When concerns arise at Games time we look at them on a case by case basis."

There was no immediate reaction from Tokyo. But Japanese Chief Cabi-

net Secretary Yoshihide Suga has said that the flag is widely used in Japan and the country's Olympic organisers did not consider hoisting the flag to be a political act.

The South Korean ministry noted that football's governing body FIFA has already banned the use of the flag. In 2017, the Asian Football Confederation imposed sanctions against Japan after Japanese spectators used the flag during the AFC Champions League.

SEVEN-TIME OLYMPIAN, PIONEER WOMAN LAWMAKER HASHIMOTO APPOINTED OLYMPICS MINISTER

Named after the Olympic flame when she was born days before Japan hosted the Summer Olympics in 1964, Seiko Hashimoto has lived up to her name by

taking part in seven Olympics and doing it in two sports.

The 54-year-old ruling party lawmaker now assumes the post of Olympics minister in Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's reshuffled cabinet, allowing her to oversee Japan's second hosting of the Summer Games that begin on July 24, 2020.

Best known as a speed skater, Hashimoto – who hails from Japan's wintry northernmost main island of Hokkaido – competed in Games from Sarajevo in 1984 to Atlanta in 1996. Three of these she took part in as a cyclist after deciding to compete in the discipline she originally took up for off-season training.

Her first name, Seiko, is written with the same first character as the Japanese

for "Olympic flame" – seika – in commemoration of the 1964 event, which opened five days after her birth and was a pivotal event in modern Japanese history.

Though the highest Olympic medal she won was a bronze at the 1992 Albertville Winter Games in the Ladies 1,500 metre race, she set a record for taking part in the most Olympic games of any Japanese woman.

She is also the only Japanese woman to compete in the Olympics while serving as a lawmaker, after she won election to the upper house of parliament in 1995 and finished her Olympic career at Atlanta as a cyclist a year later.

After marrying a policeman whose first wife had died, in 2000 she made history again by becoming the first up-

per house lawmaker to give birth while holding office. She kept working almost until her daughter was born, reportedly just two hours after she entered hospital.

Hashimoto's husband brought three children to their marriage and they had two more, making her the mother of six – three boys and three girls. She has focused on education and children in her policy pursuits and also puts priority on health issues and Japan's falling birth rate.

Currently vice president of the Japanese Olympic Committee, she has also served as a Tokyo 2020 Executive Board member and president of the Japanese Skating Association. Hashimoto will also serve as Minister in Charge of Women's Empowerment.

CYCLING

Gilbert claims Vuelta stage double, Roglic retains lead

AFP
Guadalajara, Spain

Belgian veteran Philippe Gilbert claimed a second win at this year's Vuelta a Espana yesterday as Slovenian Primoz Roglic remained in the lead but with a new challenger.

Deceuninck-Quick Step's Gilbert, 37, backed up his victory on day 12 in Bilbao with a powerful finish on the flat in Guadalajara to pip Irish rider Sam Bennett.

Former winner Nairo Quintana, who started the day sixth overall, jumped to second.

The trio were part of a breakaway group of more than 40 riders to escape in windy conditions just after the start of yesterday's 17th stage.

After aggressive riding on the longest day of this year's Vuelta, 14 survivors finished more than five minutes ahead of the pack.

"It was a very special one. I

RESULTS	
STAGE:	1. Primoz Roglic (SLO/JUM) 66hrs 43min 36sec, 2. Nairo Quintana (COL/MOV) at 2min 24sec, 3. Alejandro Valverde (ESP/MOV) at 2:48, 4. Tadej Pogacar (SLO/UAE) 3:42, 5. Miguel Angel Lopez (COL/AST) 3:59, 6. Wilco Kelderman (NED/SUN) 5:05, 7. Rafal Majka (POL/BOR) 7:40, 8. James Knox (GBR/DEC) 8:03, 9. Carl Fredrik Hagen (NOR/LOT) 10:43, 10. Dylan Teuns (BEL/BAH) 12:21.
OVERALL STANDINGS:	

think it's the kind of stage that will stay in history, because of the way we rode. It was crazy from the gun," Gilbert said.

"Sometimes on the flat we even went at 75kph. Throughout my career I have never done this. And that after 17 years," he added.

Race leader Roglic, who signed a new contract with his Jumbo Visma team on Tuesday,

finished in the main pack with most of the other general standings rivals, including Alejandro Valverde and fellow countryman Tadej Pogacar but was unhappy his team had to spend the day chasing.

"I made a mistake," said Roglic.

"I shouldn't have been in the position I was - I should have been totally in front. Maybe we

lost the battle today, but not the war.

"It's still looking really good," he added.

Quintana rocketed to second, 2min 48sec behind Roglic and 56sec ahead of Valverde.

Quick-Step placed seven of its eight riders in the breakaway which escaped in cross-tail winds.

The team was rewarded with Gilbert's 11th Grand Tour stage victory and with Briton James Knox breaking into the top 10 of the overall leaderboard.

Gilbert's patient work paid off in the final moments.

Bennett, who had won two sprints earlier in the race, burst clear with 500m to go but, with 200m left, Gilbert took the lead and finished two seconds of the Bora-Hansgrohe rider.

Today's 177.5km mountainous stage 18 includes four challenging climbs before arriving at Becerril de la Sierra, to the north-west of Madrid.



Team Deceuninck rider Belgium's Philippe Gilbert (centre) celebrates as he crosses the finish line and wins the 17th stage of the 2019 La Vuelta yesterday. (AFP)

BASKETBALL

France eliminate USA from World Cup

'It doesn't mean much if you don't win the gold, but it will go down as one of the biggest wins of my career and one of the biggest wins for French basketball for sure'

AFP
Dongguan, China

France blew the Basketball World Cup wide open yesterday by handing the United States their first loss in the competition in 13 years in their quarter-final clash, powered by a double-double from big man Rudy Gobert of the Utah Jazz.

The historic 89-79 win for France eliminates the Americans early from the competition in China, dashing their hopes of a third straight title.

The prospect of an American exit had looked increasingly possible after the USA sent a squad of second-tier stars and the loss is likely to prompt soul-searching in USA basketball.

Gobert, the two-time NBA Defensive Player of the Year, had three blocks, including a key rejection down the stretch to help France seal the victory in the southern Chinese city of Dongguan. The 7ft, lin centre called the win "unbelievable".

"I've been dreaming about this for a while. I was thinking we might never get the opportunity (to beat the USA) again and I told that to the guys," Gobert said. "It doesn't mean much if you don't win the gold, but it will go down as one of the biggest wins of my career and one of the biggest wins for French basketball for sure."

In a hint of the sniping that may result in the United States over the debacle, shooting guard Donovan Mitchell, who lead the Americans with 29 points, hit back at critics of the team.

"You guys are going to go on and say who we didn't have but why don't you all focus on who we do have?" he told reporters.

"We have 12 guys that want to compete for America, just like every other country. It sucks that some of our country people don't feel that way about us, but we don't care. We wanted to



Kemba Walker (left) of the US fights for the ball with France's Rudy Gobert during the Basketball World Cup quarter-final in Dongguan yesterday. (AFP)

compete and we did."

France will play Argentina tomorrow, who made it to the final four by defeating Serbia.

CONSOLATION MATCH
The USA loss sets up an enticing consolation match with Serbia today. Packed with NBA players, the two were tournament favourites and will be trying to salvage pride.

Yesterday's contest was marked by big lead changes, and Mitchell's jumpers and slashing

moves to the basket helped the Americans cut down a 10-point French advantage in the third quarter to seize back the lead.

But Mitchell cooled in the fourth and the French came back, led by Gobert and sharp-shooting small forward Evan Fournier of the Orlando Magic, who led France in scoring with 22 points.

Fournier slashed to the hoop for a driving lay-up to give France the lead again at 78-76 with about three minutes re-

maining in the game.

With under a minute left and down by four, Mitchell squirted into the lane for a layup but Gobert smothered the shot by his Jazz teammate and the Americans were never able to get any closer.

The win raises the prospect of France adding a Basketball World Cup title to the football World Cup hardware they won in Russia last year.

They will first have to get past Argentina. In the other bracket,

Spain will face the winner of Australia-Czech Republic, who tipped off later Wednesday.

The writing was on the wall for the United States which, lacking big names like LeBron James and Steph Curry, lost to Australia two weeks ago in an exhibition.

The loss in Melbourne was the first for the United States in 78 consecutive games in major competitions and exhibition games. They also struggled to defeat Turkey in overtime earlier in the World Cup.

GOLF

New PGA Tour season starts with dust yet to settle on old one

Reuters
New York

It is only 16 days since Rory McIlroy was crowned FedEx Cup champion but players are already gearing up for the new US PGA Tour season with the opening event, the Greenbrier Classic, kicking off in West Virginia today.

With the calendar even more crowded thanks to the golf event at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the Classic will be the first of 49 official FedEx Cup events, of which 11 will be played between now and late November as part of the so-called 'wraparound' season.

World number 10 Bryson DeChambeau heads the field in West Virginia, while the spotlight will also be on 2018 US amateur champion Viktor Hovland as the Norwegian makes his debut as a Tour member after a series of impressive results since turning pro in June.

The event will be followed by four more in the United States before the Tour crosses the Pacific for a three-event Asian swing with tournaments in South Korea, China and the new Zozo Championship in Japan, which replaces Kuala Lumpur's CIMB Classic on the calendar.

McIlroy and Tiger Woods are among a host of top names already signed up to play in Japan.

The top American and international players will be active until just before Christ-

mas due to the Dec. 12-15 Presidents Cup at Royal Melbourne in Australia, and after a short break the 2020 campaign will roll on at a relentless pace.

From late February through late August there is a top event pretty much every other week, with the July 30-Aug. 2 Olympic golf competition jammed in just two weeks after the British Open, and two weeks before the start of the FedEx Cup playoffs.

DRIVER TESTING
The new season will also mark the introduction of random testing of players' drivers to ensure they are legal.

The game's international governing body, the R&A, tested drivers at the British Open in July and found Xander Schauffele's to be non-conforming, but the PGA Tour until now has not tested.

Yet to be unveiled by the Tour is a new pace-of-play policy, which is being reviewed following complaints about slow play and after a video of DeChambeau taking more than two minutes to line up a putt at a tournament in August went viral.

While world number one Brooks Koepka and number two McIlroy will have heavy schedules Woods is again expected to again carry a lighter load.

He played only three non-majors since winning the Masters in April, and recent knee surgery suggests he will be just as sparing in his appearances in the new season.



World No 10 Bryson DeChambeau.

Groenewegen claims third win, Trentin takes Tour of Britain overall lead

Dutch rider Dylan Groenewegen won his third stage in five days at the Tour of Britain as Italy's Matteo Trentin moved into the overall lead yesterday.

Groenewegen, who also won the first and third stages, finished ahead of Britain's Matt Walls and Trentin after a sprint finish through Birkenhead Park in the Wirral. Trentin's four-second time bonus for finishing third was enough to put the Mitchelton-Scott rider back into the leader's green jersey, three seconds ahead of Dutch rider Mathieu van der Poel with Belgium's Jasper De Buyst in third, 10 seconds back. Today's sixth stage could decide the outcome of the race

with a 14.4 kilometre time trial around Pershore offering plenty of scope for changes in the general classification.

RESULTS
1. Dylan Groenewegen (NED/JUM) 3hr 57min 31sec, 2. Matthew Walls (GBR/GBR) at same time, 3. Matteo Trentin (ITA/MTS) s.t., 4. Cees Bol (NED/SUN) s.t., 5. Mike Teunissen (NED/JUM) s.t.
Overall standings
1. Matteo Trentin (ITA/MTS) 21hr 33min 55sec, 2. Mathieu van der Poel (NED/COC) at 3 sec, 3. Jasper De Buyst (BEL/LOT) 10 secs, 4. Simon Clarke (AUS/EF1) 17 secs, 5. Mike Teunissen (NED/JUM) 18 secs.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Australia names team for World Athletics Championships

Athletics Australia have today announced a team of 57 athletes for the IAAF World Athletics Championships Doha 2019, which will be held from September 27 to October 6.

The team for the 17th edition of the World Championships is the second largest to represent Australia.

"It's an exciting team," said head of high performance and coaching Christian Malcolm. "There's a mix and blend within the team. We've got experience there but also a lot of youngsters

coming through. I'm really excited to see how they perform, really."

Headlining the team are Commonwealth Games high jump champion Brandon Starc (IAAF world rank No.2) and Kelsey-Lee Barber (IAAF world rank No.2), who will both arrive after second-place finishes at the IAAF Diamond League final in Zurich.

AUSTRALIAN TEAM MEN

100m: Rohan Browning
400m: Steven Solomon
800m: Peter Bol, Luke Mathews

1500m: Ryan Gregson, Stewart McSweyn, Matthew Ramsden
5000m: Morgan McDonald, Stewart McSweyn, Patrick Tiernan

10,000m: Harry Summers
Marathon: Julian Spence
3000m steeplechase: Ben Buckingham
110m hurdles: Nicholas Hough
High jump: Joel Baden, Brandon Starc

Long jump: Henry Frayne, Darcy Roper, Henry Smith
Discus: Matthew Denny
20km race walk: Dane Bird-Smith, Rhydian Cowley

4x400m: Alex Beck, Murray Goodwin, Tyler Gunn, Ian Halpin, Steven Solomon

WOMEN
400m: Bendere Oboya
800m: Catriona Bisset, Morgan Mitchell
1500m: Georgia Griffith, Linden Hall, Jessica Hull
5000m: Melissa Duncan
10,000m: Sinead Diver, Ellie Pashley
Marathon: Rochelle Rodgers
3000m steeplechase: Paige Campbell, Genevieve LaCaze, Georgia Winkcup
100m hurdles: Brianna Beahan

400m hurdles: Lauren Boden, Sarah Carli, Sara Klein
High jump: Nicola McDermott
Pole vault: Elizaveta Parnova
Long jump: Brooke Stratton
Javelin: Kelsey-Lee Barber
20km race walk: Katie Hayward, Jemima Montag
50km race walk: Claire Woods
4x100m: Melissa Breen, Maddie Coates, Kristie Edwards, Nana Adoma Owusu-Afriyie
4x400m: Ellie Beer, Rebecca Bennett, Lauren Boden, Bendere Oboya, Gabriella O'Grady, Caitlin Sargent-Jones, (IAAF)

FOCUS

India name 25-member team for Doha Worlds

Agencies
New Delhi

The Athletics Federation of India selection committee has announced a 25-member national team including 16 men and nine women for the IAAF World Championships to be held in Doha, Qatar, from September 27 to October 6.

With less than a year to go for the Olympic Games in Tokyo, the well-prepared squad will carry the hopes of the track and field fans of the country.

The AFI believes that the 4x400m relay teams will all perform better than they did in the World Relays in Yokohama in

May last. "We have invested a lot of time in the 400m runners, getting them to train under renowned coach Galina Bukharina. We believe that the squad has been well prepared to deliver the best results on the World stage," AFI President Adille J Sumariwalla said.

Metric miler Jinson Johnson, who is now training with coach Scott Simmons in Colorado Springs, United States of America, has caught the eye with his consistency.

In recent months, he improved his own national record in the 1500m twice, first with a time of 3:37.62 in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, on June 15 and then 3:35.24 in Berlin on September 1 to make the grade.

THE TEAM

Men: Jabir MP (400m Hurdles), Jinson Johnson (1500m), Avinash Sable (3000m steeplechase), KT Irfan and Devender Singh (20km race walk), Gopi T (marathon), Sreeshankar M (long jump), Tajinder Pal Singh Toor (Shot Put), Shivpal Singh (Javelin Throw), Mohamed Anas, Nirmal Noah Tom, Alex Antony, Amoj Jacob, KS Jeevan,

Dharun Ayyasamy and Harsh Kumar (4x400m men's & mixed relay).

Women: PU Chitra (1500m), Annu Rani (javelin throw), Hima Das, Vismaya VK, Poovamma MR, Jisna Mathew, Revathi V, SubhaVenkatsan, Vithya R (4x400m women & mixed relay).

Long jumper M Sreeshankar, among the first Indians to attain the IAAF qualifying standard with a leap of 8.20m in the National Open Championships in Bhubaneswar in September last year, has regained form after a

heel injury kept him away from the Asian Championships in Doha in April.

He recently found the 8.00m mark again and will gain form from competing in the big stage.

While 400m runner Arokia

Rajiv is unavailable due to injury, the selectors decided to discuss the case of javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra who is undergoing a rehabilitation programme after an elbow surgery at a later stage.

The selection committee also approved the names of sprinters Dutee Chand (100m women), Archana Suseentran (200m women) and high jumper Tejaswin Shankar subject to invitation from IAAF based on their world rankings.

The committee also decided to conduct confirmatory trial for quarter-miler Anjali Devi for selection in the team in the individual women's 400m.

The trial will be conducted on September 21 at NS-NIS Patiala.



India's middle-distance runner Jinson Johnson.

SPOTLIGHT

Cheruiyot turns focus to gold quest at World C'ships

'In Doha it will depend on the conditions and how the heats go. Anything can happen at a championship..'

Had it not been for a rookie error in his first ever international race, Timothy Cheruiyot may not be the same runner - and three-time Diamond League champion - that he is today.

He can now look back on the experience and smile, but in the aftermath of the 2015 IAAF World Relays in The Bahamas he faced backlash back home in Kenya for throwing away the chance of a world record in the distance medley relay. Cheruiyot, aged 19 at the time and far less experienced than almost everyone else in the race, covered the first lap of his 1600m leg in a lactic-inducing 51.96, opening up a three-second lead on the USA. Over the last two laps, though, USA's Ben Blankenship clawed back the deficit and overtook Cheruiyot in the closing stages, clocking a world record of 9:15.50.

"It was amazing but also nerve wracking," he says. "I was young and inexperienced but I also had a lot of adrenalin. I was told by the team coaches that I'd be running the anchor leg and my goal was to bring the baton home in a world. It was a lot of pressure."

"Looking back on it now, of course I know that I went out too fast. Ben Blankenship was a great competitor that day and he and his teammates deserved the world record. I was still really pleased to get silver, but people at home blamed me for not getting gold. It was quite difficult for me."

It wasn't long before Cheruiyot redeemed himself. He set 1500m PBs of 3:35.24 and 3:34.86 in the months that followed and went on to finish seventh in the World Championships final in Beijing. The race in Nassau acted as the catalyst for Cheruiyot wanting to improve as a runner.

"The experience gave me a hunger for wanting more international races and to get better at 1500m running."

Throwing away the chance of a world record wasn't the first missed opportunity of Cheruiyot's career, nor was it the last. One year earlier, he finished third over 800m at Kenya's trials for the 2014 World U20 Championships, missing a place on the team by 0.07. He finished fourth in the 1500m at Kenya's 2016 Olympic Trials, missing a place on the team for Rio by half a second.

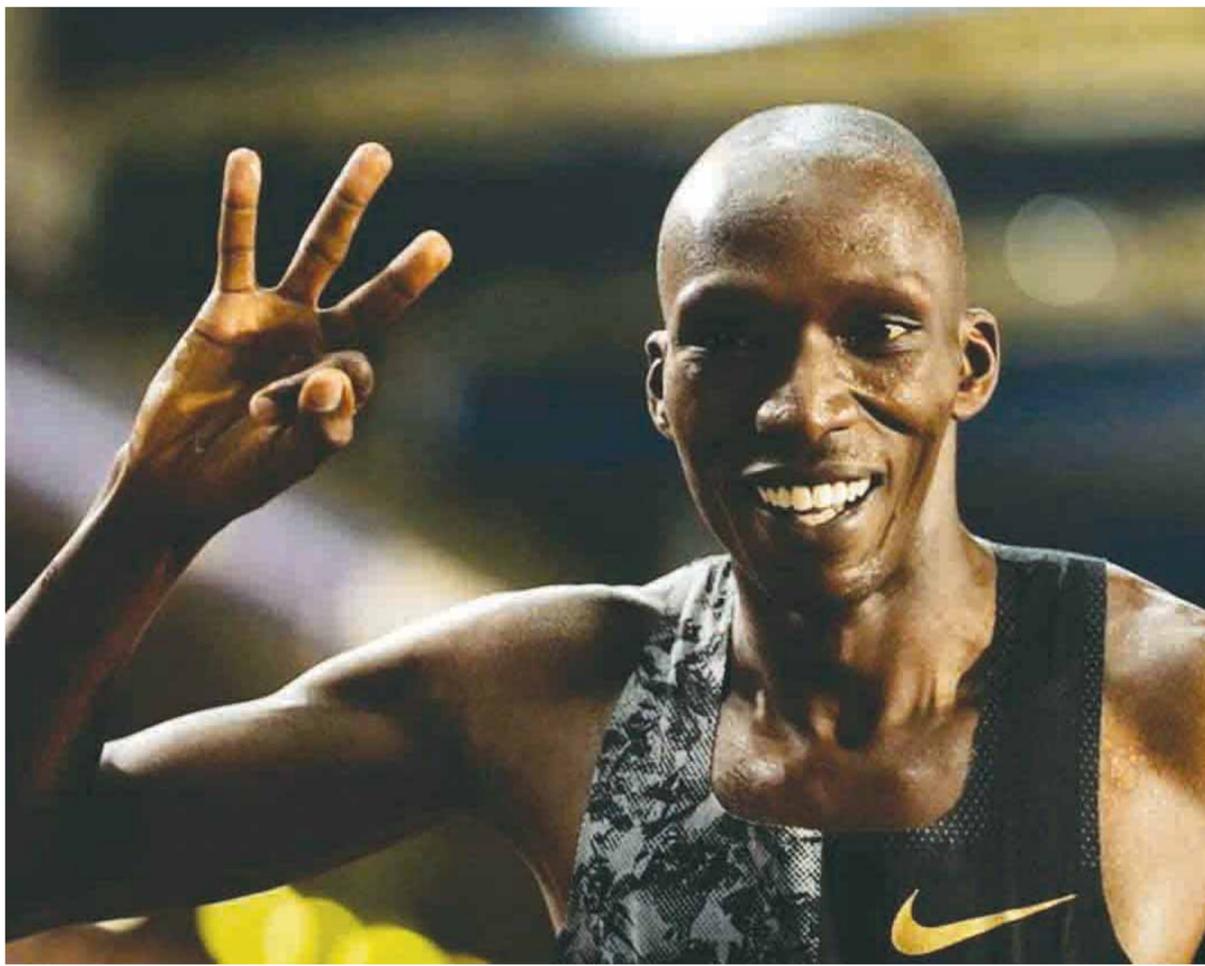
He also has a streak of four successive major championship silver medals, but he doesn't count those as disappointments, especially the three that have been earned when finishing second to training partner Elijah Manangoi.

The world champion doesn't always get the better of Cheruiyot, though, especially on the IAAF Diamond League circuit. In fact, Cheruiyot has been the more dominant in that arena, winning 11 of his 12 Diamond League races between 2018 and 2019, capped last weekend in Brussels with his third successive Diamond trophy. The success of the two men has been very much a team effort, spearheaded by coach Bernard Ouma.

"We help each other," Cheruiyot says of Manangoi. "Elijah is three years older than me but he has assisted me in my running. We work hard together in training under Bernard's guidance, each pushing the other so we both improve."

NEW COACH, NEW GROUP, NEW FOCUS

When Cheruiyot finished third at Kenya's 2014 World U20 trials, it came with a silver lining. Ouma, the founder and head coach at Rongai Athletics Club (RAC), was there at Nyayo National Stadium and watched the middle-distance races with keen interest.



Timothy Cheruiyot at the IAAF Diamond League final in Brussels after winning a third consecutive Diamond trophy at 1500m. (AFP/Getty Images)

Earlier that year, 1994 Commonwealth steeplechase silver medalist Gideon Chirchir had told Ouma to keep an eye out for Cheruiyot at the Kenyan World U20 trials. After seeing him run, Ouma invited Cheruiyot to join RAC.

"After missing out on a place, Timothy looked dejected and frustrated," recalled Ouma. "I was surprised he could run 1:45.92 with his rugged and unpolished running style. But I soon came to

6 The experience gave me a hunger for wanting more international races and to get better at 1500m running.

— Timothy Cheruiyot, on missed opportunity in 2015 IAAF World Relays in The Bahamas

realise his trainability and his motivation to run well."

Cheruiyot - whose uncle was a national-level 5000m and 10,000m runner - had dabbled with running during his younger years. He started to get more serious in 2012 when, with the support of a good friend, he attended a training camp. He returned home in 2013 but continued to train.

"It was tough when I was in Bomet County when I was training there in 2012 and 2013," says Cheruiyot.

"It was difficult to combine my desire to be a good athlete with the responsibilities to my family home life. I had to do small jobs here and there for money."

Joining Ouma's club in 2014 was a significant turning point in Cheruiyot's career. With Ouma's guidance, quality training partners, and a tailored training plan, Cheruiyot thrived.

"At RAC I have set up a structured working system with individual goals, prioritised to individual efforts and capabilities," says Ouma.

"Just like the others, Tim is very disciplined, dedicated, and knows what he wants. He believes in himself, his coach and the training plan, which he follows to the letter."

In his first full season as a member of RAC, Cheruiyot finished seventh at the IAAF World Championships Beijing 2015. He took the silver medal at the African Championships in 2016 and reduced his PB to 3:31.34. After breaking 3:30 for the first time in 2017, he took the silver medal behind Manangoi at the World Championships in London and won his first Diamond trophy.

Further sub-3:30 clockings and Diamond trophies followed in 2018 and 2019. Manangoi, meanwhile, followed his world title with gold medals at the 2018 Commonwealth Games and African Championships.

"Timothy and Elijah are unique in their own ways," explains Ouma.

"The age difference is a factor, but Tim happens to be rising faster to join Elijah at the world-class level. Elijah is more of a talent-dominant athlete while Tim is sheer hard work and some percentage of talent. Championship

years require experience, which they are both acquiring gradually and differently.

"Above all, they are dedicated individuals exploring their capabilities and limitations," he adds. "They don't fear making mistakes and are not risk-averse. And they always encourage each other, regardless of which one wins or loses."

Cheruiyot and Manangoi - and, in fact, the whole of RAC - are just as supportive of each other during their training sessions. And given that many of their runs take place in Nairobi National Park - home to more than 400 species of wildlife including lions, giraffes, zebras and rhino - it pays to look out for one another.

"Lions are lazy. And leopards and cheetahs are no problem," says Ouma. "But buffalo are a big thing for us. They're a huge threat, especially if you find one or two isolated from a group. They might feel threatened and so will get aggressive and want to defend themselves."

"We encountered that once with Winnie Chebet (world indoor 1500m finalist). From the back of the pack, I could hear her calling out, 'Coach! Coach!' I said, 'what is it?' and she told me she could see a buffalo charging. I was able to use my motorbike to scare it away while the others crossed the road. The shock was notable because after then she struggled to keep up with the pace in that long run."

Such experiences haven't put off Cheruiyot. In fact, his favourite session is an 11.5km threshold run around Nairobi National Park.

"It's all about endurance," says Cheruiyot. "I do that session each week and it's always good to compare my times from before and with others. George Manangoi (world U20 champion) actually has the record for this session, not me or Elijah."

6 Just like the others, Tim is very disciplined, dedicated, and knows what he wants. He believes in himself.

— Ouma, founder and head coach at Rongai Athletics Club

TURNING SILVER AND DIAMONDS INTO GOLD

Cheruiyot's greatest achievements so far, he says, are his three Diamond trophies and his world silver medal. But at the IAAF World Athletics Championships Doha 2019, which will be held from 27 September to 6 October, he will have the opportunity to add to his medal collection.

"First I need to qualify," says Cheruiyot, who will be competing at Kenya's World Trials on September 12-13.

"In Doha it will depend on the conditions and how the heats go. Anything can happen at a championship but I have the solid belief that the past two

years of experience since the World Championships in London has given me everything in my tool kit to know I can be on the start line and believe in myself and my right tactics."

Cheruiyot's three fastest times this year - 3:28.77 in Lausanne, 3:29.97 in Monaco and 3:30.22 in Brussels - have been set in races with differing paces. The outcome has been largely the same, though: Cheruiyot opens up a big gap on the rest of the field before the last lap and holds his lead to the finish to win by a comfortable margin.

Cheruiyot's lifetime best of 3:28.41, set last year in Monaco, puts him seventh on the world all-time list and is just 2.41 seconds shy of Hicham El Guerrouj's world record. He is confident of climbing up that list and perhaps one day even beating El Guerrouj's 3:26.00.

"I'm not the kind of person to talk about world records and I don't really know when the time may be to properly try," says Cheruiyot, who won the Kenyan 800m title last month in a PB of 1:43.11.

"But this season I have tested out various approaches to racing. I take confidence from my run in Lausanne, for example, 1:49 for the opening 800m wasn't a mistake. People always criticise when the pace is fast at 400m and 800m but everyone else ran a PB or national record in that race."

"I can run 3:26 something if the conditions are right and with good pacers," he adds.

"I have to believe that I can break the world record. If I don't believe that, then I am limiting myself. Eliud Kipchoge believes he can break two hours and that's what drives him. As professional athletes, the mind is crucial and over the past four years my confidence has built steadily."

"A world record is a dream, and a realistic one, but it takes so much hard work. It has taken me four years to get to 3:28, but I know I am very close to 3:27 and better still. I also want to run as long as I can and over longer distances in future."

"But medals - that's what is important to me," he adds. "I want to be world, Olympic and Commonwealth champion in 1500m."

Cheruiyot's achievements over the past few years have turned him into something of a celebrity back in his hometown of Singoret. He usually goes back there for six or seven weeks when the season is over and will spend time on his various business ventures, including farming, building rental houses, and hiring out his tractor.

"I love this time with family and friends," he says. "When I'm training, I try to go back one weekend every month."

When he next returns to Singoret, he hopes to do so with a gold medal around his neck.

"Winning the world title would be such an amazing achievement for me," he says.

"I really took on a lot of risk two years ago in London by making it fast and leading from the front. I have learnt so much in my running, whether for my club (Kenyan Prisons) or for my country at the African Championships, Commonwealth Games or Diamond League races. This time I am focused on trying to win gold for my country."

"I can't really describe what it would feel like as it has never happened to me before," he adds. "But as a professional athlete, we must have the biggest goals and a vision for how to get there - and this is one of them." (IAAF)