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GOLF

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FOOTBALL/AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Duhail advance as Rayyan put it across Saudi's Al Hilal

El Arabi records injury time double as QNB Stars League winners Duhail sail into the knockouts of the tournament



Al Rayyan players acknowledge their fans after defeating Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal yesterday. At right, Youssef El Arabi shows his joy after helping Al Duhail beat Lokomotiv Tashkent. PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil and agency

By Sports Reporter
 Doha

A dramatic injury time brace from Youssef El Arabi saw Qatar's Al Duhail snatch a stunning 2-1 win over Lokomotiv Tashkent in their 2018 AFC Champions League yesterday, the top Qatari side becoming the first team to qualify for the knockout stages.

After spurning a number of opportunities early on, Uzbekistan international Sardor Rashidov gave Lokomotiv the lead in the 35th minute, slotting home Shukhrat Muhammadiev's cutback to score his second goal of the tournament.

ment.

The hosts went on to end the half with a 1-0 lead and could have been further ahead had it not been for the heroics of Al Duhail keeper Amine Lecomte. In the second half, Al Duhail went on the offensive in search of an equaliser but were reduced to just a single shot on target in the face of a defiant defensive display from Lokomotiv.

However, just as the Central Asians thought they had the three points in the bag, Al Duhail were awarded a penalty in the 90th minute after Almoez Ali was felled in the box by Salim Mustafiev. El Arabi stepped up and duly dispatched the spot-kick to net his fifth goal of the campaign.

And there was still time for a dramatic conclusion as in the fourth minute of stoppage time, El Arabi showed great composure to deceive his marker and finish past Ignaty Nesterov to complete his side's comeback in dramatic fashion.

The result means that Al Duhail have ensured a spot in the Round of 16 after a fourth successive win in Group B. Both teams have away fixtures coming up on Matchday Five, with Al Duhail facing Zobahan in Isfahan while Lokomotiv travel to Abu Dhabi to take on Al Wahda.

Meanwhile in Doha, last year's runners-up Al Hilal's chances of qualifying for the last 16 stage of the AFC Champions League suffered a huge blow when

they were beaten by Qatar's Al Rayyan.

Saudi giants Al Hilal, who were narrowly beaten 2-1 by Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds in the two-legged finals last November, were clearly off colour as Michael Laudrup's Al Rayyan dominated play and created more chances at the Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Stadium in Doha.

The teams had played a 1-1 draw in the first leg last week, but yesterday Abdelrazzaq Hamdallah played a starring role for Al Rayyan to give them their first victory after three consecutive draws.

The Moroccan first struck from the penalty spot in the 44th minute after he was brought down by Abdulla al-Zori

and then produced a delectable back-heel pass inside the box to allow captain Rodrigo Tabata to consolidate in the 66th minute.

Yasser al-Qahtani pulled one back for Al Hilal in the 90th minute courtesy of a penalty but that was little consolation as they stayed bottom of Group D with just two points from four matches, leaving them in serious danger of missing the knockout stages of the tournament.

Meanwhile, Tsukasa Shiotani's late goal earned Al Ain a 1-1 away draw against Group D rivals Esteghlal.

Al Ain tried to open the scoring early in the game, but Rayan Yaslam's left footed effort missed the target by a narrow margin 12 minutes in. Omar Abdulrahman tested the goalkeeper from outside the box but Seyed Hosseini was alert and made the save in the 24th minute.

Three minutes before the half time whistle, Mame Thiam's third goal of the competition restored parity from the spot after Farshid Esmaili was brought down inside the box.

Six minutes after the restart, Al Ain's Marcus Berg's shot was saved following a headed pass from Abdulrahman. Al Ain continued to dominate and push for an equaliser, and they were finally rewarded in the 78th minute when Shiotani unleashed a powerful shot that left the Iranian goalkeeper helpless.

PREVIEW

Al Sadd seek revenge over Uzbek side Nasaf

By Sports Reporter
 Doha

Al Sadd are in revenge mode as they seek to make amends for their upset loss to Uzbekistan's Nasaf last week when they clash in their AFC Champions League return clash at the Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Stadium today.

Azizjon Ganiev's penalty just after the hour secured a 1-0 victory for Nasaf in the southern Uzbekistan city Qarshi as the hosts recorded back-to-back home wins to move level on points with the Qatari team and Iran's Persepolis.

The 2011 AFC Champions League winners had won their opening two games in Group C but missed the opportunity to go six points clear of Nasaf and now look like being in a three-way battle for the two last 16 qualification spots.

But today in front of their home fans Al Sadd would be a different proposition as they would also be keen to bounce back from their defeat to Umm Salal in the QNB Stars League, which allowed Al Duhail to secure the domestic title



Al Sadd coach Jesualdo Ferreira and forward Baghdad Bouendjah speak to the media yesterday.

with two matches to spare.

"It was disappointing to lose against Nasaf in the away match and also to Umm Salal in the league. It's a hectic schedule for teams who are involved in domestic as well as international

competitions but we have to somehow cope."

Al Sadd coach Jesualdo Ferreira said yesterday. "But we have to keep our focus and concentrate on the job on hand and try to secure three points which will help us in qualifying for the

next phase," the Portuguese national added.

Baghdad Bouendjah, who has been on a goal-scoring spree ever since he returned from injury a month ago, also expressed his confidence ahead of the match.

"We were unlucky in the first match but we are confident now as the pressure of the league is now off our shoulders. We are confident of winning three points," the Algerian said.

Saydullo Rakhmatov is suspended for the visitors, who are looking for only their second win away from home in the competition, after he picked up a second booking of the group stage last week.

Meanwhile, Al Wasl will be eliminated from the AFC Champions League if they suffer a fourth successive defeat in today's game with Group C leaders Persepolis at Zabeel Stadium.

Farshad Ahmadzadeh and Ali Alipour got on the scoresheet as Persepolis claimed a 2-0 victory over Al Wasl in Tehran last week to remain top of the standings at the midway point of the group stage.

The loss was Al Wasl's third in a row and, realistically, only a win on home soil will keep their hopes of reaching the next phase alive. They will be able to call on Ali Salmin once more

after the midfielder served a one-game ban last week.

Persepolis go into the encounter boasting a fine recent record against Emirati opposition, having won their last five games against sides from the UAE, and a sixth victory in succession would leave them in a strong position ahead of the last two rounds of fixtures.

Also today, Al Gharafa take on Saudi side Al Ahli in Jeddah after they salvaged a 1-1 draw in Doha last week following a last-gasp Robert Quijada equaliser.

Al Ahli have now won two and drawn one of their three Group A fixtures and sit three points ahead of second-placed Al Jazira and third-placed Al Gharafa, who are on four points apiece.

Victory for Al Gharafa would move them level on points with Al Ahli opponents and make the group extremely interesting ahead of the final two rounds of fixtures as they aim for a third appearance in the knockout rounds.

Both sides go into the game on the back of wins in their domestic campaigns, with Al Ahli defeating Al Quadisiya 1-0 on Saturday and Al Gharafa running out 3-0 victors over Al Sailiya a day earlier.

SELECTION

Three uncapped players in Brazil squad for friendlies

'Willian Jose has had two great seasons at Real Sociedad, really developing as a player'

Reuters
Rio de Janeiro

Uncapped Real Sociedad striker Willian Jose and Besiktas midfielder Anderson Talisca were the surprise inclusions in Brazil's squad to face Russia and Germany in friendlies later this month, as head coach Tite announced his squad yesterday.

Both men were given the chance to impress in what was a larger than usual 25-man squad, Tite's last before naming the 23 who will go to the World Cup in Russia.

"Willian Jose and Talisca bring different components," Tite told reporters.

"Willian Jose has had two great seasons at Real Sociedad, really developing as a player.

"Talisca can finish from mid-distance, from balls in the air, he has a physical presence that can be an advantage against defences set up in lines of four or five."

The inclusion of Valencia goalkeeper Neto and 32-year-old Gremio captain Pedro Geromel were also unexpected. Neto got his first call up in 2010 but has never played for the national side. Geromel's only appearance for Brazil was in a friendly against Colombia in 2017 to raise money for the victims of the Chapecoense airline disaster. Brazil play Russia in Moscow on March 23 and then face World Cup winners Germany in Berlin four days later.

The five-times world champions kick off their World Cup campaign against Switzerland on June 17 before facing Costa Rica and Serbia.

They have lost just once in the 17 matches since Tite took over, 1-0 to Argentina in a 2017 friendly in Australia, but the match against Germany in particular will be a big test and the first time they have faced the Europeans since they went down 7-1 in the World Cup semi-final four years ago.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Alisson (Roma/ITA), Neto (Valencia/ESP), Ederson (Man City/ENG).

Defenders: Daniel Alves (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Fagner (Corinthians) Filipe Luis (Atletico Madrid/ESP), Marcelo (Real Madrid/ESP), Miranda (Inter Milan/ITA), Marquinhos (PSG/FRA), Thiago Silva (PSG/FRA), Geromel (Gremio), Rodrigo Caio (Sao Paulo).

Midfielders: Casemiro (Real Madrid/ESP) Fernandinho (Manchester City/ENG), Fred (Shakhtar Donetsk/UKR), Paulinho (Barcelona/ESP), Renato Augusto (Beijing Guoan/CHN), Willian (Chelsea/ENG), Philippe Coutinho (Barcelona/ESP), Talisca (Besiktas/TUR).

Forwards: Gabriel Jesus (Manchester City/ENG), Roberto Firmino (Liverpool/ENG), Douglas Costa (Juventus/ITA), Willian Jose (Real Sociedad/ESP), Taison (Shakhtar Donetsk/UKR).



REAL SOCIEDAD FRONTMAN WILLIAN JOSE NAMED IN THE BRAZIL SQUAD TO FACE RUSSIA AND GERMANY.

WARM-UP

Russia recall Cheryshev and Selikhov

AFP
Moscow

Russia coach Stanislav Cherchesov has recalled Villarreal midfielder Denis Cheryshev and Spartak Moscow goalkeeper Alexander Selikhov for World Cup warm-up matches against Brazil and France later this month.

The World Cup hosts will take on five-time world champions Brazil at Moscow's renovated Luzhniki Stadium on March 23, while the friendly with the 1998 World Cup winners France will take place in St Petersburg four days later.

Russia have recently lost Spartak full-back Georgy Dzhikiya and CSKA Moscow defender Viktor Vasin to serious cruciate knee ligament injuries, while Mario Fernandes of CSKA has a hip injury.

As a result, Cherchesov has recalled Andrei Semenov of Akhmat Grozny and

Lokomotiv Moscow winger Vladislav Ignatiev. Meanwhile, former Real Madrid player Cheryshev, who has recovered completely from a string of injuries, will get the chance to win his first cap since 2015 and 10th overall. Spartak 'keeper Selikhov is called up for the first time.

Cherchesov has also called up two players with experience of the German Bundesliga - Fenerbahce defender Roman Neustadter and Konstantin Rausch, who joined Dynamo Moscow in the last winter transfer window. However, Neustadter is a doubt after suffering a neck injury.

Zenit striker Alexander Kokorin and Krasnodar forward Fedor Smolov, the top scorer in the Russian league in the last two seasons and leading the way again this season, will spearhead Russia's attack.

Squad

Goalkeepers: Igor Akinfeev (CSKA Moscow), Vladimir Gabulov (Club Brugge/

BEL), Andrei Luney (Zenit St Petersburg), Alexander Selikhov (Spartak Moscow)

Defenders: Vladimir Granat, Fedor Kudryashov (both Rubin Kazan), Yuri Zhirkov, Igor Smilnikov (both Zenit St Petersburg), Vladislav Ignatiev (Lokomotiv Moscow), Dmitry Kombarov, Ilya Kutepov (both Spartak Moscow), Roman Neustadter (Fenerbahce/TUR), Konstantin Rausch (Dynamo Moscow), Andrei Semenov (Akhmat Grozny)

Midfielders: Denis Glushakov, Roman Zobnin, Alexander Samedov (all Spartak Moscow), Alexander Golovin, Alan Dzagoev (both CSKA Moscow), Alexander Erokhin, Daler Kuzyayev (both Zenit St Petersburg), Anton Miranchuk, Alexei Miranchuk (both Lokomotiv Moscow), Denis Cheryshev (Villareal/ESP), Anton Shvets (Akhmat Grozny)

Forwards: Anton Zabolotny, Alexander Kokorin (both Zenit St Petersburg), Fedor Smolov (Krasnodar).

BUNDESLIGA

Struggling Hamburg sack coach Hollerbach

AFP
Hamburg

Bundesliga strugglers Hamburg have sacked coach Bernd Hollerbach just seven weeks after he was appointed, the club announced yesterday.

Hamburg have replaced Hollerbach, who used to play for the club, with Christian Titz, the coach of their under-21 team, until the end of the season.

Hollerbach failed to win any of his seven matches at the helm, with Saturday's 6-0 capitulation away to leaders Bayern Munich proving the final straw.

The former European Cup winners lie in the relegation zone, seven points from safety with just eight games remaining.

A first ever relegation from the top flight of the Bundesliga is

on the cards for a club who have sailed close to the wind in recent years - they needed to win relegation play-offs to survive in 2014 and in 2015.

"We are convinced we have to do something to preserve our chances of staying up," said Frank Wettstein, the temporary club chief after president Heribert Bruchhagen and sporting director Jens Todt were ousted last week.

Hollerbach, 48, had been appointed on January 22 after the sacking of Markus Gisold but under his charge Hamburg picked up just three points from a possible 21.



Poor attendances at Arsenal home games a worry for Wenger

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger is worried by an apparent dip in attendance at the Emirates stadium in recent weeks but said he is confident the team will do "absolutely everything" to win back their fans. British media reports said there were thousands of empty seats in Arsenal's 3-0 Premier League win over Watford on Sunday despite the club selling 59,131 tickets, just short of their total capacity of 59,867 seats. The stadium was a lot emptier in the 3-0 league defeat by Manchester City earlier this month although freezing conditions could have kept fans away on that day.

Wenger acknowledged that empty seats were a concern. "Of course I worry because I want our fans to be behind our team and be happy," Wenger told Standard Sport. "But after what happened in that week (against City) it's a bit understandable.

"We are in a job where we have to get the fans on our side and do absolutely everything to achieve it. That's what we want to do." Arsenal are sixth in the league with 48 points and face an uphill task to qualify for next season's Champions League by finishing in the top four. "I don't know how much negativity is out there. I focus on my job. I think I've shown in 22 years that I can do that, that I'll respect everyone's opinion and focus on my job with total commitment," Wenger said. Their hopes of participating in Europe's elite competition next season hinge on winning the Europa League. Arsenal beat AC Milan 2-0 in the first leg of their last 16 clash and take on the Italians at home on Thursday.

SPOTLIGHT

Champions League live & exclusive on beIN

The UEFA Champions League round of 16 wraps up and the competition's final eight teams will be determined by the end of this week.

As always, beIN will bring you live, exclusive and multilingual coverage of all the match-ups throughout the week as well as the quarter-final draw, which takes place on Friday.

Manchester United host Sevilla at Old Trafford on Tuesday after their first leg encounter ended in a goalless draw. Join Angus Scott who will be in the company of Ruud Gullit and Karl-Heinz Rummenigge in the English studio on beIN SPORTS HD11 starting at 22:00 Mecca time.

If you wish to watch Roma against Shakhtar Donetsk instead, you can tune in to beIN SPORTS HD12.

On Wednesday, it's the highly anticipated clash between Barcelona and Chelsea. Eng-

lish studio coverage will also begin at 22:00 Mecca time on beIN SPORTS HD11. The match will also be available in Arabic, French and Spanish on beIN SPORTS HD1, HD14 and HD17 respectively.

Before that, though, Besiktas host Bayern Munich. Kick-off for that one will be at 20:00 Mecca time on beIN SPORTS HD12.

Don't miss the quarter-final draw on Friday to find out who will face who as the competition heats up. Live coverage gets underway at 14:00 Mecca time on beIN SPORTS HD11.

It's football's top club competition and definitely one you won't want to miss. Visit beIN.net/subscribe and picking one of many available packages. That includes the beIN Elite package, which brings you free CONNECT subscription, beIN's over the top (OTT) offering that allows viewers to watch matches anytime and anywhere.

FOCUS

Greek league suspended after gun controversy

AFP
Athens

Greece's top-flight football championship was suspended indefinitely yesterday, a minister said, hours after the owner of the PAOK team invaded the pitch with a gun strapped to his belt.

"We have decided to suspend the championship," deputy minister for sport Yiorgos Vassiliadis told reporters after an emergency meeting with Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras.

"It will not start again without a new framework agreed by all," Vassiliadis said, adding that the government was in close contact with European football body UEFA, which he said had been "shocked" by the incident.

Police have issued a warrant for the arrest of PAOK owner, Greek-Russian businessman Ivan Savvidis, after he stormed the pitch on Sunday, accompanied by bodyguards, to confront the referee in protest at a 90th-minute disallowed goal in a top-of-

the-table clash against AEK Athens.

The match was interrupted as AEK's squad walked off the pitch. The goal was later allowed.

Vassiliadis said the government had "fought to clean up" Greek football "and would not allow all this effort to be threatened".

"We await proposals from the federation and the league," he said. "A tougher framework is needed."

He did not rule out the prospect of Greek clubs sitting out next season's European matches, but insisted the national team would not be affected.

PAOK and AEK are in a neck-and-neck race for the league title, which would be their first in over 14 years.

Olympiakos have won the last seven championships under the ownership of Greek shipowner Vangelis Marinakis, who, like Savvidis, is one of Greece's most prominent businessmen.

The league suspension is the latest stopgap measure adopted by the Tsipras government to maintain order in a championship spiralling out of control.

Clashes

Less than a month ago, fans of the four most popular clubs - AEK, PAOK, Olympiakos and Panathinaikos - were banned from away games after recurring violence. This was after Olympiakos fans clashed with police on February 4 after a shock home defeat to AEK dealt a serious blow to their title defence.

Yet a few weeks later, another match in PAOK's Toumba stadium had to be abandoned after a cashier roll thrown from the stands hit the coach of visiting rivals Olympiakos.

PAOK were initially docked three points, but managed to overturn the decision on appeal.

A tobacco industrialist with extensive holdings in the northern port city of Thessaloniki, Savvidis controls the city's top hotel and recently also bought one of Greece's top newspapers, Ethnos. The 58-year-old, a former lawmaker with the party of Russian president Vladimir Putin, is considered a political ally of Tsipras.

A police source on Monday said Savvidis was not sought over the gun, for which he has a license, but for the

pitch invasion, a misdemeanour that carries no prison term.

Savvidis, who owns companies that are leading sponsors of the Greek league, defended his behaviour.

"Ivan (Savvidis) didn't threaten anybody with a gun," his media department told Russia's *Sport Express* newspaper.

"It means that the provocative headlines in certain media are totally untrue.

"He carries weapons as he has a permission for it. It's not prohibited in Greece.... Savvidis has allowed himself some excessive emotions but, once again, he didn't threaten anybody with a gun."

Last year, Savvidis was part of a Franco-German consortium that won a bid for the privatisation of the Thessaloniki port authority.

But the deal was postponed after a Russian bank backing Savvidis was placed under temporary administration. In a rare step, the US embassy in Athens later expressed concern over the issue, suggesting a lack of transparency over the funding behind the deal.



Paok Thessaloniki president Ivan Savvidis (centre) carrying a handgun in his waistband to the pitch after the referee refused a last minute goal during the Greek Superleague match between Paok Thessaloniki and AEK Athens in Thessaloniki on Sunday. (AFP)

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Martial fit for Sevilla clash: Mourinho

'If we go through to the quarter-final draw, doesn't matter the opponent'

Reuters
London

Anthony Martial is fit and available for Manchester United's Champions League round of 16, second-leg game at home to Sevilla, manager Jose Mourinho said yesterday.

The French forward missed last week's Premier League victories over Crystal Palace and Liverpool but trained yesterday ahead of the visit of the Spanish club today.

Midfielder Paul Pogba remains a doubt, however, as United try to capitalise on the 0-0 draw in the first leg in Spain.

"I don't know if (Pogba) is fit but he trained after you left," Mourinho told a news conference after a training session that was open to the media. "Martial is fit yes."

Zlatan Ibrahimovic also trained with the squad although Mourinho did not offer any clues as to whether the Swedish striker might be involved against Sevilla.

He has not played since Dec 26. United go into the game full of confidence after Saturday's 2-1 victory over Liverpool cemented their place in second spot in the Premier League to make their qualification for next year's Champions League via a top-four finish highly likely.

That is a marked contrast to last season when they finished sixth and had to win the Europa League to earn a place back in the continent's elite club competition. Asked if United have the potential to go all the way this season, Mourinho was cautious.

"Not yet, but when a team reaches the last eight anything is possible," he said. "Now I have only one name and that is Sevilla, I know it is very difficult to go through."

"If we go through to the quarter-final draw, doesn't matter the opponent, will always be one of the big names in European football but we will try."

Midfielder Michael Carrick sat alongside Mourinho in the news conference and the former England international confirmed he will end his playing career at the end of the season.

The 36-year-old has made only three appearances since experiencing an irregular heart

Mourinho hits back at De Boer over Rashford comments



Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho during a press conference on the eve of the Champions League match against Sevilla yesterday. (Reuters)

Manchester United boss Jose Mourinho has labelled Frank de Boer the 'worst manager in the history of the Premier League' after the Dutchman criticised his handling of young England striker Marcus Rashford. De Boer, who lasted only 77 days as Crystal Palace manager after losing his first four league games in charge with no goals scored, said in an interview on *BT Sport* that it was "a pity" Mourinho was Rashford's manager because he was not getting enough chances. Rashford, 20, has been on the bench 15 times in the league this season but scored twice to secure a 2-1 victory over Liver-

pool on Saturday having been named in the starting line-up. Mourinho did not hold back when asked about De Boer's comments during his news conference ahead of today's Champions League last 16, second leg tie against Sevilla. "I read something, some quote from the worst manager in the history of the Premier League, Frank de Boer saying it's not good for Rashford to have a coach like me," Mourinho said. "If he was coached by Frank he would be coached how to lose because he lost every game." De Boer is not the only pundit to question Mourinho's conservative approach when it

comes to Rashford who is vying for a starting place alongside the likes of Romelu Lukaku, Anthony Martial and Alexis Sanchez. But the Portuguese disputes the idea that Rashford is being held back under his charge. "If you go to his numbers and how many games he played with me. I would say he was in the top five with more matches for two seasons," Mourinho said. "Marcus is having these experiences. I'm really happy too. He plays for United many matches, he starts some comes from the bench for others. Does he play every match from the start? No. "Of course not. He's a player we

trust. Not many were expecting him to start against Liverpool and he had a good match not just about scoring goals. I'm really happy with Marcus." Meanwhile Rashford is confident his development will not suffer from a lack of game time after scoring twice in a 2-1 victory against Liverpool on his return to the Manchester United starting line-up. "In these types of games, when the pressure is on you, you just be yourself and I think that's what seems to happen in these games and the team seems to react well, when maybe we don't react as well in other games," said the 20-year-old.

rhythm in September.

"There comes a time when, as much as you like or don't like it, your body tells you it's time to stop playing. It's something you have to accept," Carrick said. "I've tried all sorts of differ-

ent things to bring the best out of me over the years and I can say that I've given my best, so I can look back with no regrets." "It's fine, it's something you've got to accept so that is where I'm at."

Carrick is, though, expected to remain at United as part of Jose Mourinho's coaching staff next season. "It's kind of been sorted," added Carrick. "We're still talking about it to

be honest so there is nothing to totally confirm yet but it's looking likely."

Carrick has won 18 trophies in 12 years at United, including five Premier League titles and the Champions League in 2008.

SPOTLIGHT

Marlos - Ukraine's Brazil-born sensation starring for Shakhtar

AFP
Kiev

Ukraine's Brazilian-born sensation Marlos has starred for Shakhtar Donetsk on a Champions League run that could see them reach the quarter-finals for the second time when they go to Roma today.

But the 29-year-old attacking midfielder's silky dribbling is also turning him into an integral part of Ukraine's hopes of returning to the forefront of the international scene after the country failed to qualify for the World Cup in Russia.

The Ukrainian player of the year for two successive seasons is the engine of a flamboyant Shakhtar side that features an eye-popping eight additional Brazilians and two Argentines.

Shakhtar edged out the Italians 2-1 at home in Kharkiv in the first leg of their last-16 encounter last month, meaning they head to the Stadio Olimpico in the driving seat.

They are also on course to retain their domestic title despite being based in three different cities over the past two years due to the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Shakhtar's Portuguese coach Paulo Fonseca has admitted that Marlos is "really important" to his side, describing him as "magical".

Certainly, having a coach who speaks Portuguese helps Marlos and the Brazilians gel into an attacking unit that has flourished in the Champions League.

Shakhtar beat Manchester City at home in the group stage and won away at Dutch champions Feyenoord despite finishing that game with 10 men.

Marlos was named February's player of the month in Ukraine after scoring four goals and laying on three assists in three matches, leaving Shakhtar sit-

ting pretty atop the table. "To me, team achievements are much more important," Marlos said after receiving the award.

'My gift to Ukrainians'
Marlos played for Brazilian giants Sao Paulo before coming to Ukraine in 2012 and settling in nicely. He first voiced an interest in playing for Ukraine's national team in 2016 as the struggling country scouted around for help.

"If this happens, it will be my gift to Ukrainians for being so welcoming," Marlos said at the time. That wish came true in September when he failed to make Brazil's star-studded squad and was granted Ukrainian citizenship.

It was a decision that endeared him to Ukrainians -- used to players looking for work elsewhere because of four years of armed conflict in the east and hard times all around.

"In this difficult time for Ukraine, many athletes leave, adopting the citizenship of other countries," said Ukraine coach and former AC Milan great Andriy Shevchenko.

"But Marlos, on the contrary, tied his future to our state. It would have been foolish not to pick such a player."

He made his debut against Kosovo in a World Cup qualifier that Ukraine won, although they missed out on a place in Russia, finishing third in their group behind Iceland and Croatia.

Marlos has found the net 40 times in 158 appearances for Shakhtar and should be an enticing option for Ukraine for years to come.

And his belief in both team and adopted country has helped Shakhtar as they look to return to the quarter-finals, where they were well beaten by eventual winners Barcelona in 2011.

"We are confident that we will be able to get the result we need in Rome," Marlos said.



Shakhtar Donetsk's midfielder Marlos Romero Bonfim attends a press conference on the eve of the Champions League round of 16 match against AS Roma at the Olympic stadium in Rome. (AFP)

FOCUS

Nzonzi returning to England with point to prove

AFP
Madrid

If Steven Nzonzi had things his way he might have been facing Cristiano Ronaldo and Real Madrid in the Champions League last week rather than Manchester United today.

The former Stoke City and Blackburn Rovers midfielder has admitted regret at not completing a deal last summer to join Paris Saint-Germain, who are still licking their wounds following a 5-2 aggregate defeat to the reigning European champions.

Born in the northern suburbs of Paris and a product of PSG's youth system, the transfer back to France had a certain pull for the 29-year-old.

"I'm Parisian, and like all Parisians, it's nice to play for your hometown team," Nzonzi told French television show *Canal Football Club*.

"It would have been a good thing, but it did not happen."

A tendency for itchy feet has been a recurring theme of Nzonzi's career, the midfielder handing in two transfer requests in successive summers at Stoke before finally leaving for Sevilla in 2015.

He bade farewell to the Premier League with a thundering long-range strike against Liverpool, in a 6-1 win that was also Steven Gerrard's final game for

his boyhood team.

Another meeting with Liverpool, a 3-3 draw in the Champions League in November, looked likely to prompt another move, after a bust-up with coach Eduardo Berizzo led to Nzonzi being substituted at half-time.

"My future is clearly away from Sevilla," Nzonzi said.

"The only thing that disappoints me is the way it has ended."

But instead, it was Berizzo who left, sacked a month later, and Nzonzi stayed, only to regain momentum and favour under current coach Vincenzo Montella.

"I'll talk to him to know his state of mind," Montella said at his opening press conference. Nzonzi has played in 16 out of Sevilla's 17 games since the turn of the year.

Fighting for World Cup place

Even at international level, Sam Allardyce was prompted by Nzonzi's father to enquire whether the midfielder could be eligible to play for England, a possibility ended by a single cap earned for France under-21s. Nzonzi won his first two caps for France's senior team in November.

Compared in his early days to a young Patrick Vieira, Nzonzi is now looking to cause the kind of havoc the former Arsenal destroyer once regularly orches-

trated at Old Trafford.

Nzonzi has no need for extra motivation. As well as being linked with other Premier League teams like Arsenal and Chelsea in the past, he is currently fighting for a place in France's World Cup squad.

United were second-best for much of the last 16, first leg between the sides at the Sanchez Pizjuan a fortnight ago but a 0-0 draw leaves Jose Mourinho's side with their noses slightly in front.

Nzonzi had perhaps the best chance of the first leg but his close-range header was tipped over by David de Gea, one of several superb saves he made on the night.

Without an away goal to sustain them, however, United will be vulnerable if Sevilla can finally find a way past the Spanish goalkeeper.

"We had chances, but it could not be," Nzonzi said after the game.

"We know that De Gea is a great goalkeeper, but we will continue fighting in the next game and we hope to win there."

Sevilla know too that their run in this year's Champions League could be their last for a while given a 2-0 defeat to Valencia on Saturday leaves them 11 points adrift of La Liga's top four.

"We have to forget this defeat and think about Tuesday. It can be a historic match for the club if we get into the quarter-finals," said Montella at the weekend.



SEVILLA MIDFIELDER STEVEN NZONZI

SECOND TEST

Rabada gets two-Test ban after starring in S Africa win

Fast bowler was found guilty of 'inappropriate and deliberate physical contact' with Australian captain Steve Smith

AFP
Port Elizabeth, South Africa

South African fast bowler Kagiso Rabada was yesterday banned for the two remaining Tests against Australia – and admitted that he would have to change how he celebrates wickets. Rabada was found guilty of “inappropriate and deliberate physical contact” with Australian captain Steve Smith after dismissing Smith in the first innings.

The setback came minutes after Rabada had put aside his disciplinary concerns to set up a series-levelling win for South Africa on the fourth day of the second Test against Australia at St George's Park. South Africa won by six wickets after Rabada's fast bowling ensured they needed to chase a modest 101 runs for victory.

He was fined 50% of his match fee and issued three demerit points after a disciplinary hearing following his denial of the charge. That took his total of points after three previous offences to eight and triggered an automatic two-Test ban. “It's going to have to stop,” he said. “I'm letting the team down and letting myself down.”

Cricket South Africa (CSA) immediately announced they had 48 hours to appeal the decision and were seeking legal opinion. CSA said Rabada would remain suspended unless a judicial commissioner was appointed early and allowed him to play pending a final decision. Rabada accepted a second charge after a send-off of David Warner in the second innings and received a further fine of 15% of his match fee and an additional demerit point.

Match referee Jeff Crowe said: “I found that there was contact between Rabada and Smith, and in my judgement the contact by Rabada was inappropriate, and deliberate. He had the opportunity to avoid the contact, and I could not see any evidence to support the argument that the contact was accidental. “It is also disappointing that this has happened the day after the pre-match meeting I had with both teams, where the importance of respect for opponents was highlighted.”

Rabada said he would need to avoid getting into close proximity with opponents. “I won't change the way I express myself but I will get far away from the batter,” he said. Rabada said he had



Australian batsman Mitchell Marsh is bowled by South Africa fast bowler Kagiso Rabada (unseen) during the day four of the second cricket Test at St George's Park in Port Elizabeth yesterday. (AFP)

contested the charge on the Smith incident because he believed he had not made deliberate contact with Smith's shoulder, which his captain Faf du Plessis described as “a shirt flick.”

“If I knew I did it deliberately I wouldn't have contested it,” said Rabada. “Honestly, I didn't feel contact in that moment. I was just so pumped up.”

Rabada said it was different from the case against him when he gave Ben Stokes of England a send-off in a Test at Lord's last year, which resulted in a single demerit point which added to a previous three points ruled him out of the next Test.

“With the Stokes incident I didn't contest it because I knew I did it,” he

said. He described his emotions as “bittersweet” after one of his best Test matches. “I would have loved to be playing in the next game, especially coming off a performance like that. I felt really good in this Test match.”

“I will have to see it as a big learning curve and not repeat the same mistake because I've repeated the same mistake in the eyes of the umpires. I'm not happy about it.” The ICC also announced a 20% fine and one demerit point for Australia's Mitchell Marsh, who accepted a charge of using “obscene or offensive language” after being dismissed by Rabada yesterday.

Meanwhile, South Africa lost four wickets before Theunis de Bruyn hit the

winning runs. AB de Villiers, whose 126 not out enabled South Africa to lead by 139 runs on the first innings, hit a quick 28 off 26 balls before he was caught at short leg off Nathan Lyon with 20 runs still needed.

Rabada took the first three of the five Australian wickets that fell for the addition of 59 runs yesterday. He had match figures of 11 for 150 – the fourth time in his 28-Test career that he had ten or more wickets in a match.

Rabada struck in the first over of the morning when he bowled Mitchell Marsh for 45 with a ball which swung in sharply. Pat Cummins fell to a sharp catch at gully by Theunis de Bruyn and Mitchell Starc edged a drive to wicket-



South Africa bowler Kagiso Rabada (front right) match figures of 11 for 150 – the fourth time in his 28-Test career that he had ten or more wickets in a match.

keeper Quinton de Kock.

Lyon was caught behind off Lungi Ngidi and last man Josh Hazlewood hit a quick 17 before being caught in the deep off left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj. Tim Paine was left unbeaten on 28. Lyon was brought on for the last over before lunch and with his first ball caught Dean Elgar off a leading edge as the left-handed batsman stretched forward. It was a near-replica of Elgar's dismissal to the off-spinner in the first innings of the first Test in Durban.

Aiden Markram had an escape in the second over of South Africa's chase. With his score on six he was dropped at first slip by Mitchell Marsh off Hazlewood. Markram made 21 before he was caught by Smith at second slip off Hazlewood. Hashim Amla and De Villiers added 49 before both were dismissed with the total on 81. Amla was caught behind off Pat Cummins for 27 and De Villiers fell to Lyon three balls later.

SOUTH AFRICA II INNINGS
A. Markram c Smith b Hazlewood 21
D. Elgar c and b Lyon 5
H. Amla c Paine b Cummins 27
A. de Villiers c Bancroft b Lyon 2 8
F. du Plessis not out 2
T. de Bruyn not out 15
Extras (b4) 4

Total (4 wkts, 22.5 overs) 102

Fall of wickets: 1-22 (Elgar), 2-32 (Markram), 3-81 (Amla), 4-81 (De Villiers)

Bowling: Starc 3-0-15-0, Hazlewood 6-0-26-1, Lyon 9-0-44-2, Cummins 4.5-0-13-1

Result: South Africa won by six wickets.

Series: The four-match series is level at 1-1.

Remaining matches:
Second Test: March 22-26, Cape Town
Third Test: March 30-April 3, Johannesburg

SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA I INNINGS 243	
SOUTH AFRICA I INNINGS 382	
AUSTRALIA II INNINGS (O/N: 180-5)	
M. Starc b Rabada 45	
T. Paine not out 28	

WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Windies see off Dutch as Ireland, Afghanistan reach Super Sixes

AFP
Harare

Big-hitting opener Evin Lewis was among the runs as the West Indies made it four straight wins at World Cup qualifying by beating the Netherlands in Harare yesterday, while Ireland and Afghanistan joined them in the Super Six stage.

Lewis hit 84 as the two-time World Cup winners racked up 309-6 from 48 overs in a weather-affected match, with the rain coming for a second time with the Dutch well adrift on 167-6. That left Jason Holder's Windies top of Group A, with Ireland progressing thanks to a 226-run thrashing of the United Arab Emirates. Paul Stirling crashed a blistering 126 as the Irish posted 313-6 from only 44 overs, before skittling out the UAE for just 91.

William Porterfield's men take two points through to the next round as the six remaining sides prepare to battle it out for the last two spots at next year's tournament in England and Wales. Afghanistan, one of the pre-tournament favourites, still have a slim chance of reaching a second successive World Cup, after Nepal beat Hong Kong by five wickets to send the Afghans through from Group B on net run rate.

The West Indies were already through to the next round, but played their strongest side against the Netherlands. Chris Gayle was at his very best early on as the 38-year-old smashed five sixes in a 31-ball 46 before holing out off Paul van Meekeren.

Lewis continued where his opening partner had left off, before Marlon Samuels made a timely return to form with an unbeaten 73, while Rovman Powell crashed a quickfire 52 after making his maiden ODI hundred on Saturday.

The Netherlands were always behind the rate, and although key player Ryan ten Doeschate was still at the crease on 67 when the game was stopped, three earlier run outs had



Blessing Muzarabani (centre) of Zimbabwe celebrates after taking Scotland's last wicket Brad Wheel during the ICC Cricket World Cup Qualifier at Queens Sports Club in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. The match ended in a tie. (ICC)

ended any chance of victory.

Zimbabwe and Scotland will start the Super Six round with three points apiece, after a thrilling tie to close out Group B in Bulawayo. Needing two runs from seven balls with two wickets in hand to chase down 211, the Scots lost two batsmen in as many legitimate deliveries, with a wide in between ensuring a tie.

A five-wicket haul from Shafyaan Sharif and Michael Leask's 4-37 restricted the hosts to 210 all out, before Berrington's 47 took Scotland to 145-4.

But a clutter of wickets left the match delicately poised, and after Tendai Chatara had dismissed Mark Watt with the final ball of the penultimate over, Blessing Muzarabani bowled a wide before having number 11 Brad Wheel caught behind by wicketkeeper Brendan Taylor.

BRIEF SCORES

Group A (At Harare)
West Indies 309-6 in 48 overs (Evin Lewis 84, Marlon Samuels 73 not out, Rovman Powell 52) v Netherlands 167-6 in 28.4 overs (Ryan ten Doeschate 67 not out, Wesley Barresi 64) West Indies won by 52 runs (DLS)
Ireland 313-6 in 44 overs (Paul Stirling 126, William Porterfield 92, Kevin O'Brien 50 not out; Mohammad Naveed 3-84) v United Arab Emirates 91 all out in 29.3 overs (Boyd Rankin 4-15, Simi Singh 3-15) Ireland won by 226 runs (DLS)
Group B (At Bulawayo)
Zimbabwe 210 all out in 46.4 overs (Craig Ervine 57; Shafyaan Sharif 5-33, Michael Leask 4-37) v Scotland 210 all out in 49.1 overs (Graeme Cremer 3-23, Tendai Chisoro 3-42) Tied match
Hong Kong 153 all out in 48.2 overs (Sandeep Lamichhane 3-17) v Nepal 155-5 in 40.4 overs Nepal won by five wickets

T20 TRI-SERIES

Thakur leads India to victory

AFP
Colombo

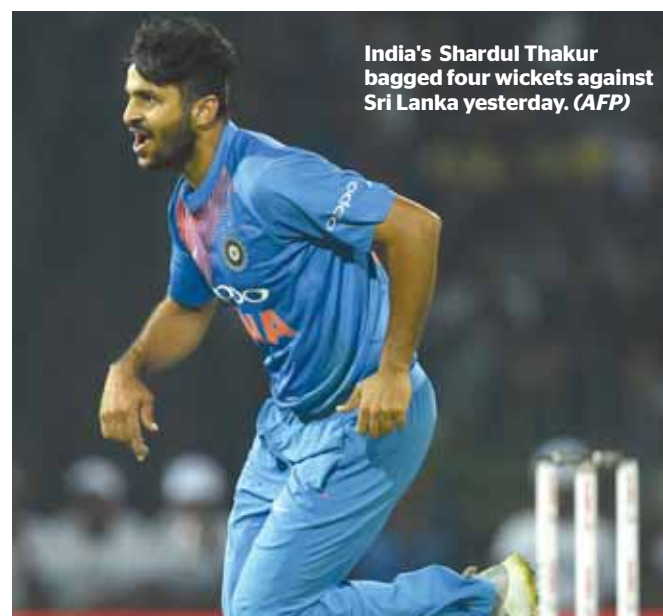
Paceman Shardul Thakur picked four key wickets to set up a comfortable six-wicket win for India in a tri-series Twenty20 international against Sri Lanka yesterday. The 26-year-old Thakur, playing his fifth T20 international, impressed with his pace and guile to help India dismiss the hosts for 152-9.

In reply, India coasted to the target with nine balls to spare, thanks to a fine 42 off 31 balls by Manish Pandey and a 39-run knock by Dinesh Karthik. India appeared in trouble at 85-4 but Pandey and Karthik batted sensibly, adding 68 runs for the unbroken fifth wicket.

The match was reduced to 19-overs a side after the start was delayed by about an hour due to rains and a wet outfield. Earlier Kusal Mendis hit a quickfire half-century to ensure Sri Lanka a competitive total on the board. The opener hit three fours and as many sixes in his 38-ball knock at the R. Premadasa stadium.

Mendis though got little support from the other batsmen as the hosts kept losing wickets at regular intervals. Thakur, who was named man of the match, bagged four wickets for 27 runs off his four overs. Upcoming off-spinner Washington Sundar took two wickets as the India bowlers fought back after a sloppy first 10 overs.

India made one change to the side that won against Bangladesh on Thursday, bringing in batsman KL Rahul in place of Rishabh Pant. Sri Lanka picked Suranga Lakmal in place of captain Dinsh Chandimal who has been



India's Shardul Thakur bagged four wickets against Sri Lanka yesterday. (AFP)

suspended for two games due to an over-rate offence.

The win propelled India into contention for a place in the final of the tournament that has Bangladesh as the third team. The next match will be played between India and Bangladesh tomorrow with the final slated for Sunday.

SCOREBOARD	
SRI LANKA INNINGS	
D. Gunathilaka c Raina b Thakur 17	
K. Mendis c Sharma b Chahal 55	
K. Perera b Sundar 22	
U. Tharanga b Shankar 3	
T. Perera c Chahal b Thakur 15	
J. Mendis b Sundar 1	
D. Shanaka c Karthik b Thakur 19	
A. Dhananjaya c Rahul b Unadkat 5	
S. Lakmal not out 5	
D. Chameera c Unadkat b Thakur 0	
N. Pradeep not out 0	
Extras (lb1, nb1, w8) 10	
Total (for 9 wkts; 19 overs) 152	
Fall of wickets: 1-25 (Gunathilaka),	
2-34 (K. Perera), 3-96 (Tharanga), 4-113 (T. Perera), 5-118 (J. Mendis), 6-120 (K. Mendis), 7-146 (Dhananjaya), 8-151 (Shanaka), 9-151 (Chameera)	
Bowling: Unadkat 3-0-33-1, Sundar 4-0-21-2, Thakur 4-0-27-4, Chahal 4-0-34-1, Shankar 3-0-30-1, Raina 1-0-6-0	
INDIA INNINGS (TARGET 153)	
R. Sharma c K. Mendis b Dhananjaya 11	
S. Dhawan c T. Perera b Dhananjaya 8	
KL Rahul hit wicket b J. Mendis 18	
S. Raina c T. Perera b Pradeep 27	
M. Pandey not out 42	
D. Karthik not out 39	
Extras (lb1, w7) 8	
Total (for 4 wkts; 17.3 overs) 153	
Fall of wickets: 1-13 (Sharma), 2-22 (Dhawan), 3-62 (Raina), 4-85 (Rahul) Did not bat: V. Shankar, W. Sundar, S. Thakur, J. Unadkat, Y. Chahal	
Bowling: Lakmal 2-0-19-0, Dhananjaya 4-0-19-2, Chameera 3-0-33-0, Pradeep 2-3-0-30-1, J. Mendis 4-0-34-1, T. Perera 2-0-17-0	

NBA

Towns powers Timberwolves to victory over Warriors

With Harden sidelined, Paul and Gordon shoulder the scoring load as visiting Houston cruise to win over Dallas

Reuters
Minneapolis

Karl-Anthony Towns followed in his own miss with 37.5 seconds to play Sunday afternoon, helping the Minnesota Timberwolves hold off the Golden State Warriors 109-103 in Minneapolis to snap a three-game losing streak.

Seeking to avoid a second consecutive loss on a three-day trip, the Warriors rallied within 104-103 on a Kevin Durant 3-pointer with 2:08 to go.

They then had a chance to go ahead for the first time since the third quarter following a Minnesota turnover, but Klay Thompson misfired on a 3-point attempt.

Towns countered with a short jumper for a three-point lead, and after Durant (game-high 39 points) missed a potential game-tying 3-pointer, the Minnesota big man snatched the rebound from his own short miss and laid it in, giving the Timberwolves a 108-103 advantage with just 37.5 seconds remaining. The Warriors missed their next two shots — they misfired on their last four in the game — and Jeff Teague helped ice the win with one free throw with 29.5 seconds left.

PACERS 99, CELTICS 97

Down by double digits in the first half, Indiana came to life in the second half after Kyrie Irving exited the game, then held off short-handed host Boston. The Celtics lost Irving at halftime due to left knee soreness.

Irving had seven points on 3-of-6 shooting and four rebounds in 16 first-half minutes but did not join the team on the court when the second half began and was ruled out shortly afterward. Al Horford (illness) and Jaylen Brown (concussion) missed the game for the Celtics. Victor Oladipo had a game-high 27 points and Myles Turner added 19 points and 10 rebounds for the Pacers, who won for the fifth time in six games in March.

ROCKETS 105, MAVERICKS 82

With MVP front-runner James Harden sidelined, Chris Paul and Eric Gordon shouldered the scoring load as visiting Houston cruised to victory over Dallas.



Minnesota Timberwolves center Karl-Anthony Towns (right) gets fouled by Golden State Warriors center Zaza Pachulia during the NBA match. (USA TODAY Sports)

While Harden rested his sore left knee, Paul and Gordon produced a shooting clinic, combining for 50 points and 10 3-pointers.

Paul added 12 assists as the Rockets recovered from a setback at Toronto on Friday night that resulted in the conclusion of their 17-game winning streak. Gordon scored 26 points while connecting on 6 of 11 3-point attempts. Paul tallied 24 points and hit 4 of 7 from deep. Houston finished 17-for-45 from behind the arc, burying eight 3-pointers in the third quarter to clinch a play-

off berth and cap a sweep of the season series against the Mavericks.

LAKERS 127, CAVALIERS 113

Julius Randle had a career-high 36 points to go with 14 rebounds, seven assists and two blocks, leading host Los Angeles past Cleveland. Brook Lopez had 22 points for the Lakers, and Kentavious Caldwell-Pope and former Cavalier Isaiah Thomas contributed 20 points each. LeBron James produced 24 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists, but his Cavaliers lost for the fourth

time in six games.

JAZZ 116, PELICANS 99

Donovan Mitchell scored 25 of his 27 points in the second half as Utah defeated host New Orleans.

Mitchell, who made 1 of 8 shots in the first half, made 9 of 13 after halftime as the Jazz outscored the Pelicans 68-48.

Ricky Rubio added 30 points and 10 rebounds, Joe Ingles scored 20 and Rudy Gobert contributed 19 points and 16 rebounds as Utah won its sixth straight game, seventh of its last nine

and 18th of its last 20. Anthony Davis returned from a one-game absence caused by a sprained ankle to play on his 25th birthday and lead New Orleans with 25 points, 11 rebounds and a career-high 10 blocks. In his absence, the Pelicans' franchise-record 10-game winning streak ended with a lopsided loss to Washington on Friday.

RAPTORS 132, KNICKS 106

Jonas Valanciunas contributed 17 points and nine rebounds to help visiting Toronto cruise to a victory over

New York. Kyle Lowry added 16 points and seven assists and Serge Ibaka had 14 points and seven rebounds for the Raptors, who won for the eighth straight time and 15th in their past 16 games.

Tim Hardaway Jr. scored 25 points for the Knicks, who have lost seven straight games and 15 of their past 16. Luke Kornet scored a career-high 18 points. New York center Enes Kanter sat out with back spasms.

NUGGETS 130, KINGS 104

Nikola Jokic recorded his seventh triple-double of the season with 20 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists, helping Denver coast past visiting Sacramento. Jokic's triple-double was the 13th of his career.

He ranks third in the NBA this season with seven, trailing only Russell Westbrook and LeBron James, with all seven having come since Jan. 8.

The win allowed the Nuggets to complete a 2-1 homestand before they embark on a stretch of eight road games in their next nine outings. The loss was the Kings' fourth in their last seven games, a stretch in which they have alternated losses and wins.

76ERS 120, NETS 97

Joel Embiid collected 21 points and eight rebounds as Philadelphia took control early in the first quarter en route to victory over host Brooklyn. Embiid shot 9 of 17 from the field and likely would have recorded his 34th double-double of the season if Philadelphia did not pull away in the opening minutes of the fourth quarter.

Robert Covington added 19 points as Philadelphia won for the fourth time in its past 12 road games.

D'Angelo Russell scored 26 points but had little help as the Nets lost for the 17th time in 20 games since Jan. 21.

BULLS 129, HAWKS 122

Bobby Portis and Zach LaVine each had 21 points and Lauri Markkanen added 19 points as Chicago had seven players in double figures in a win over host Atlanta. Taurean Prince had a career-high 38 points and Mike Muscala added 19 points to lead the Hawks, who lost for the fourth time in five games.

Chicago rebounded from a brutal first quarter to win for the third time in five games after losing five straight.

NHL

Penguins reclaim first in Metro

Reuters
Pittsburgh

Patric Hornqvist and Jamie Oleksiak scored goals in the first period, and the Pittsburgh defense limited Dallas to just 18 shots as the Penguins outlasted the visiting Stars 3-1 on Sunday. Pittsburgh recaptured first place in the Metropolitan Division with the win, which was its fourth in its past five matches.

Alexander Radulov scored a power-play goal for Dallas in the second period, but Pittsburgh sealed the win on Evgeni Malkin's empty-netter in the last minute. Penguins goalie Casey DeSmith made 17 saves for the win, while Dallas' Kari Lehtonen stopped 27 shots.

"I don't really think I need to be a guy that scores a bunch of goals or gets a bunch of points," said Oleksiak, who scored his fifth of the season. "We have a lot of that here." Malkin is a prime example with his 39th goal of the season and an assist. He has 87 points to pull one behind league-leader Nikita Kucherov of Tampa Bay. Malkin's 39 goals are also one from the league's co-leaders — Washington's Alex Ovechkin and Winnipeg's Patrik Laine. "I just don't want to think about that," Malkin said. "I want to sleep at night. It's a good challenge for me."

Malkin, now with 919 points, moved past Pavel Datsyuk for fifth on the NHL's all-time points list among Russian-born players. Malkin, with 38 points in his last 20 games, also equaled a season-high six-game points streak.

"It has been confidence, I think," Malkin said. "I feel it again, and if you score in one or two games, you feel so much better."

Casey DeSmith made 17 saves for the Penguins with starter Matt Murray out for his seventh game with a concussion.

"You can tell by the way we played tonight that we are trying to get into that playoff mode," DeSmith said.

ISLANDERS 5, FLAMES 2

Christopher Gibson made 50 saves to earn his first NHL victory, and Johnny Boychuk led the offensive attack with a goal and two assists as visiting New York beat Calgary. Anders Lee added two goals for the Island-



Pittsburgh Penguins center Sidney Crosby (centre) knocks the net onto Dallas Stars goaltender Kari Lehtonen as Stars defenseman Dan Hamhuis (right) defends during the second period of the NHL game in Pittsburgh on Sunday. (USA TODAY Sports)

ers, who snapped an eight-game losing skid (0-4-4). Gibson, starting just his third game this season and fifth of his career, was under siege the final two periods but held strong enough.

With a pair of goals 28 seconds apart in the early going, the Islanders made it a horrible return for Flames goalie Mike Smith, who missed 13 games due to injury. Smith made 22 saves.

BLACKHAWKS 3, BRUINS 1

Patrick Kane scored the tiebreaking goal on the power play with 3:16 remaining in the third period, and host Chicago pulled away for a win over Boston. Artem Anisimov and Brent Seabrook also scored for Chicago, which split its home-and-home weekend

series against the Bruins.

The Blackhawks snapped a two-game skid. Zdeno Chara scored for the Bruins, whose six-game winning streak ended.

COYOTES 1, CANUCKS 0

Darcy Kuemper made 26 saves for his third shutout of the season as host Arizona blanked Vancouver.

The Coyotes improved to 10-3-2 in their past 15 games after beating the Canucks for the second time in less than a week.

Vancouver has lost three straight and 14 of its past 18 games. Arizona defenseman Oliver Ekman-Larsson scored the game's only goal, in the second period, and Kuemper held off the Canucks as they made a late charge in the closing moments.

MLB ROUND-UP

Arrieta agrees 3-year deal with Phillies

The Philadelphia Phillies and free agent right-hander **Jake Arrieta** reached agreement on a three-year, \$75mn contract, according to multiple reports on Sunday. Arrieta will earn \$30mn in 2018, \$25mn in 2019 and \$20mn in 2020, according to reports. He can opt out of the deal after two years.

However, the Phillies can void the opt-out in the form of a two-year extension for the 2020 and 2021 seasons, which would pay Arrieta a base salary of \$20mn each year that could climb as high as \$30mn with performance incentives.

The extension would go up to \$25mn each season based on games started in the first two years of the deal or up to \$30mn based on Cy Young finishes, bringing the potential overall value of his contract as high as \$135mn.

Arrieta was one of the last big names still available after a controversially slow off-season regarding the signing of marquee free agents. Last week saw fellow Scott Boras clients Mike Moustakas and Carlos Gonzalez each agree to deals for less money than expected with their former teams, the Kansas City Royals and Colorado Rockies, respectively, as well as another top starter, Lance Lynn, agreeing to terms with the Minnesota Twins.

Meanwhile, the Twins granted right-hander Anibal Sanchez his unconditional release less than a month after signing him to a non-guaranteed contract. Sanchez, 34, had a 13.50 ERA over four innings in two spring outings for the Twins.

He was 3-7 with a 6.41 ERA in 28 appearances (17 starts) for the Detroit Tigers last season.

"We wanted to give him every opportunity to sign with another big league team and compete for their rotation," Twins general manager Thad Levine said. "I don't think we're over-evaluating or under-evaluating performances at this juncture. It had everything to do with what we represented. The opportunity was not there for him anymore."

CINCINNATI REDS PITCHER DESCLAFANI SIDELINED FOR INDEFINITE PERIOD

Cincinnati Reds pitcher Anthony DeSclafani has an oblique injury that will sideline him for an indefinite period, manager Bryan Price said. An oblique injury kept the right-hander from making his 2016 debut until mid-June, and he went 9-5 with a 3.28 ERA in 20 starts upon his return.

DeSclafani missed all of 2017 with an elbow injury. The 27-year-old was injured in his last start



Friday against the Texas Rangers, according to Price. DeSclafani pitched three innings, striking out one batter and walking one in his third appearance of the spring.

BLUE JAYS RELEASE CARRERA

The Toronto Blue Jays released Ezequiel Carrera to begin thinning out candidates for the outfield in the upcoming season, according to multiple reports. Carrera, 30, played a career-high 131 games and produced a .282 batting average and a .356 on-base percentage in 2017, but Toronto's offseason acquisitions of Curtis Granderson and Randal Grichuk made him expendable.

Carrera was removed from the Jays' 40-man roster earlier this month and sent down to Triple-A Buffalo. He was scheduled to make \$1.9mn this season.

GOLF

Casey wins as Woods finishes one stroke behind

The old Tiger magic was mostly missing on Sunday as the 14-times major champion tried to record his 80th PGA Tour victory, and his first since 2013



Paul Casey poses with the trophy after winning the Valspar Championship golf tournament on Sunday. **PICTURE:** Jasen Vinlove-USA TODAY Sports

Reuters
Miami

Englishman Paul Casey surged to victory at the Valspar Championship in Florida on Sunday as Tiger Woods came tantalisingly close to ending his five-year drought.

Woods, who finished one stroke behind Casey, lamented a "couple of putts here and there" that could have led to his 80th PGA Tour victory.

His solid performance, however, provided further proof that he is a force again after last April's spinal fusion surgery on his lower back.

"Unfortunately I just didn't quite feel as sharp as I needed to with my irons, played a little conservative because of it," Woods told reporters at Innisbrook Resort in Palm Harbor. "It showed in my amount (two) of birdies today."

"I've been here before a few times, so I felt very comfortable. As a whole I felt very good about what I did this week."

The old Tiger magic was mostly miss-

FINAL SCORES

Leading final-round scores on Sunday from the US PGA Tour's Valspar Championship in Tampa, Florida (USA unless noted, par 71):

274 – Paul Casey (ENG) 70-68-71-65
275 – Patrick Reed 71-69-67-68, Tiger Woods 70-68-67-70

276 – Sergio Garcia (ESP) 70-72-69-65
277 – Rory Sabbatini (RSA) 70-71-67-69, Justin Rose (ENG) 70-69-66-72

278 – Jim Furyk 70-73-69-66

279 – Jason Kokrak 72-67-72-68, Webb Simpson 71-68-70-70, Branden Grace (RSA) 73-68-68-70, Trey Mullinax 72-68-69-70

280 – Adam Hadwin (CAN) 71-70-71-68, Steve Stricker 70-71-70-69, Sean O'Hair 71-68-71-70, Sam Burns 71-69-67-73

281 – Jamie Lovemark 72-73-68-68, Ryan Blaum 73-69-70-69, T.J. Vogel 73-70-69-69, Abraham Ancer (MEX) 72-73-67-69, Zach Johnson 73-68-69-71, Blayne Barber 70-70-70-71, William McGirt 71-70-69-71, Luke List 70-71-69-71, Louis Oosthuizen (RSA) 71-69-69-72,

Adam Scott (AUS) 70-73-66-72, Russell Knox (SCO) 69-74-66-72, Corey Conners (CAN) 67-69-68-77

ing on Sunday as the 14-times major champion tried to record his 80th PGA Tour victory, and his first since 2013.

Missing, that is, until the par-three 17th, where Woods perfectly read and then executed a 43-foot birdie putt, his ball curling deliciously into the centre of the cup as the gallery went berserk.

But Woods could not replicate the

magic at the par-four 18th, where he missed a difficult 40-foot birdie putt that would have forced a playoff with Casey.

Woods carded 70 and had to settle for second with fellow American Patrick Reed (68), who made an embarrassing bogey at the last when his first putt, through the fringe, failed to make it up the hill and rolled all the way back to his feet.

When the dust settled, Casey, long in the clubhouse with a 65 for 10-under 274, could finally celebrate his second victory on the PGA Tour.

"Probably not the most significant win of my career, but it's certainly one of the most satisfying ones, the quality of the golf I played," said Casey, who has also won 13 times on the European Tour.

"I know I made some errors yesterday – I hit it in the water twice – but as a whole I would say it's one of the cleanest weeks I've ever had from kind of a golf course management point of view."

Woods, meanwhile, kept his eye on the long game as he prepares for the April 5-8 Masters at Augusta National.

"I believe my game is progressing," he said. "I had really some nice building blocks at Honda (equal 12th two weeks ago) and I've had a few tweaks for this week and it paid off."

"Just a couple of things with my set-up and I was just trying to get my posture organised a little bit more... little things (that) just make for better passes through the golf ball."

BOTTOMLINE

Woods continues rankings rise as Casey jumps five places

AFP
Paris

Former world number one Tiger Woods moved back into the world's top 150 on Monday, after falling just short in his bid for a first title since 2013 at the Valspar Championship.

England's Paul Casey jumped up five places to 12th in the rankings, after edging out the 14-time major champion by one stroke in Florida on Sunday.

The 42-year-old Woods, who was ranked outside the top 1,000 just last year after struggling with injuries, is now back up to number 149 as he prepares for his latest tilt at an 80th PGA Tour title in the Arnold Palmer Invitational this weekend – a tournament he has won eight times.

He climbed 239 places after finishing tied-second behind Casey with Patrick Reed.

Reigning Masters champion Sergio Garcia returned to the world's top 10 thanks to a final-round 65 which saw him



Tiger Woods plays his second shot on the 18th hole during the final round of the Valspar Championship at Innisbrook Resort Copperhead Course in Florida.

finish tied-fourth at the Valspar.

American Dustin Johnson maintains a healthy lead over compatriot Justin Thomas at the top of the rankings, after taking a week off.

World's top 20

1. Dustin Johnson (USA) 10.52 average pts
2. Justin Thomas (USA) 9.32
3. Jon Rahm (ESP) 8.56
4. Jordan Spieth (USA) 8.09
5. Justin Rose (ENG) 7.36
6. Hideki Matsuyama (JPN) 7.13
7. Rickie Fowler (USA) 6.39
8. Brooks Koepka (USA) 5.88
9. Sergio Garcia (ESP) 5.80 (+2)
10. Jason Day (AUS) 5.76 (-1)
11. Tommy Fleetwood (ENG) 5.51 (-1)
12. Paul Casey (ENG) 5.47 (+5)
13. Rory McIlroy (NIR) 5.39 (-1)
14. Tyrrell Hatton (ENG) 4.93 (-1)
15. Henrik Stenson (SWE) 4.85 (-1)
16. Marc Leishman (AUS) 4.84
17. Alex Noren (SWE) 4.83 (-2)
18. Phil Mickelson (USA) 4.51
19. Pat Perez (USA) 4.35
20. Matt Kuchar (USA) 4.20

SPOTLIGHT

Els to captain Internationals at 2019 Presidents Cup



Reuters
London

South African Ernie Els will be captain of the International team for next year's Presidents Cup at Royal Melbourne Golf Club in Australia, a source told Reuters yesterday.

The official announcement is expected to come today at the Arnold Palmer Invitational in Orlando at which time Tiger Woods will be named US captain, according to Golf.com. Els, a four-time major winner, takes over from Nick Price who has guided the Internationals at the last three Presidents Cups, including last year when the United States romped to a 19-11 victory on home soil at Liberty National in New Jersey.

The US has dominated the biennial competition that pits the top American golfers against the world's best outside of Europe with a 10-1-1 record.

Els and Woods featured prominently in the event's only draw when they faced each other in a sudden death playoff in 2003 in South Africa to decide the trophy only to have it declared a tie when fading light forced an end to play after three extra holes.

Woods, who was an assistant captain last year when sidelined with back problems and will fill a similar position this year when the US take on Europe in the Ryder Cup in France, could find himself filling the role of playing captain in Australia.

After years of battling back issues, Woods looked close to his old dominant self on Sunday when he finished runner-up to Englishman Paul Casey at the Valspar Championship.

Woods' solid performance was further proof that the 14-time major winner is a force again after last April's spinal fusion surgery on his lower back, coming tantalisingly close to ending a five-year title drought.

Golf rules to receive major overhaul from 2019, R&A and USGA confirm

Berlin: The rules of golf will receive a massive overhaul from 2019, the sport's governing bodies confirmed yesterday, in a move designed to speed up play and make the game easier to understand. The R&A and the United States Golf Association (USGA) said that the key changes would include being allowed to leave the flag unattended in the hole while putting, a simplified dropping procedure and the removal of a penalty for a double hit.

The changes were a reaction to proposals released for public

consultation in 2017, some of which were changed after feedback but the majority of which were kept. Many of the old rules – such as those covering the putting green and bunkers – have been relaxed, while the time allowed for looking for a lost ball has been reduced from five to three minutes. Initiated in 2012, the changes have been introduced "to ensure that the rules are easier to understand and apply for all golfers and to make the game more attractive and accessible to newcomers," the governing bodies said in a joint statement.

RUGBY

England will learn from painful defeats: Jones

AFP
London

Eddie Jones believes despite two 'very painful' defeats which ended England's two year Six Nations reign they can learn from the experience and bounce back.

The 58-year-old Australian – who prior to the Six Nations had suffered just the one defeat since taking over after the 2015 World Cup debacle – said defeat helps in the evolution of great sides.

Jones now has the sizeable challenge of trying to raise his side's morale after defeats to Scotland and France ahead of hosting newly crowned champions Ireland as the visitors bid to seal only their third Five/Six Nations Grand Slam.

England are yet to lose at Twickenham under Jones and the Irish have not won there since 2010.

"No, not at all," said Jones when asked did he lack belief in his players.

"Every good team goes through this period. It's actually an essential part of developing a great team."

"The learnings we'll get from this, albeit very painful, are absolutely crucial going forward because it's about how we respond," added Jones.

Jones, who guided England to the Grand Slam in 2016 and then was denied another one a year later when the Irish upset them in Dublin, said the principal hurdle to overcome was

the dent to the players confidence.

"It's not as if we can't play rugby, we know we've got good players as they've played for the Lions and won games for England," said Jones.

"When you get a loss it tests your mental resolve and that's the test we've got to face."

"Obviously we need to get over the disappointment of losing to France."

Jones, who said captain Dylan Hartley was back in training after his leadership skills were badly missed in the French defeat, said the Irish deserved their title win.

"We've just got to focus now on Ireland," said Jones, who revealed wing Elliott Daly faces a scan on his left foot.

"We've started that with a short run this (Monday) morning and a couple of meetings to get us on the front foot."

"Ireland are a good team. I said at the start of the tournament they're a good team and they've proved that – they're worthy champions of the Six Nations."

Defeat by Ireland would condemn England to their worst Six Nations performance since 2006 – the last time they lost three games in a Championship – and they could finish as low as fifth in the table.

Meanwhile, Irish prop Cian Healy is fit to train despite suffering a shoulder injury in the victory over Scotland on Saturday handing a boost to Six Nations Grand Slam aspirants Ireland.

TENNIS

Federer takes care of business, Daniel stuns Djokovic

Serbian fades in final set against Daniel of Japan, Federer wins delayed match in second set tiebreak

AFP
Indian Wells, United States

World number one Roger Federer finished off Federico Delbonis in a rain-disrupted match on Sunday to reach the third round at Indian Wells as five-time champion Novak Djokovic was toppled.

Federer returned to stadium court on Sunday afternoon and needed an hour to close out his second-round victory 6-3, 7-6 (8/6).

"It's been a long time since I have been interrupted at night and have to come back the next day," Federer said.

His title defence got off to a soggy start Saturday night when play was suspended because of rain showers with Federer up a set and tied 2-2 in the second.

The clouds rolled in just before the start of their match on Saturday and after a short delay to start the first set they managed to play until the skies blackened and the heavy rains came in the second. After another 90-minute delay organisers suspended play for the night.

Federer is making his 17th appearance in the California desert and is assured of remaining world number one if he makes it to the semi-finals.

He extended his 2018 win streak to 13 matches and has only dropped three sets from 34 played this year.

Federer hit five aces and won 74 percent of his first serve points in the match which took a total of one hour and 41 minutes over the two days.

He will face 25th-seed Filip Krajinovic in the third round.

Federer and 10th seed Djokovic both came into the tournament seeking to become the first six-time winner of the event. But Djokovic fell at the first hurdle with a shock loss to Japanese qualifier Taro Daniel, who sent the out-of-sorts Serb tumbling with a hard-fought 7-6 (7/3), 4-6, 6-1 victory.

It was another snag in the return for world number 13 Djokovic, who admitted he lacked composure while playing in just his second event of 2018 and first since having surgery.

'Very weird'

Djokovic said it felt like the "first match I ever played on the



Novak Djokovic of Serbia walks off the court dejected after losing his match to Taro Daniel of Japan at the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells, California. (Getty Images/AFP)

tour."

"I mean, I just completely lost rhythm, everything," he said.

Djokovic is making a cautious return to the ATP Tour after stopping his 2017 season following Wimbledon due to a right elbow injury.

He lost to Chung Hyeon in the Australian Open fourth round in January before undergoing the surgery.

Djokovic scrambled to win the second set on Sunday but the rust from the layoff was evident as he made 62 unforced er-

rors overall. Djokovic had four aces but served poorly overall, making four double faults.

Federer said he understands well how even a champion like Djokovic could be struggling to find his game so soon after having surgery. "To me, it's not that surprising," Federer said.

"When you go away from the game for over a two-month period, it starts feeling a little bit that way. When you do come back from injury or when you haven't played in a long time, it

just takes extra effort. "It is still early stages for Novak coming back and the first one after surgery. He's only going to get better from here."

Daniel, who is ranked 109th in the world, advanced to the third round where he will face Gael Monfils of France.

In other men's matches, Juan Martin del Potro steamed his way into the third round as the sixth seed needed just 69 minutes to beat Australian teenager Alex de Minaur 6-2, 6-1.

Argentina's del Potro, who is

fresh off winning the Mexican Open title in Acapulco, hammered five aces and broke de Minaur's serve five times.

The win sets up a third round showdown with Spaniard David Ferrer who defeated Tennyson Sandgren of the US 6-2, 7-6 (7/3). World number three Marin Cilic also won Sunday, defeating Marton Fucsovics in straight sets, 7-5, 6-3. World No 5 Alexander Zverev slumped to a shock 7-5, 5-7, 6-4 defeat to unheralded Joao Sousa in his opening match.

FOCUS

Aspire Academy and OFC enter new partnership

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Aspire Academy and the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) have signed an unprecedented agreement, dubbed the OFC Performance License, entering into a partnership focused on elite performance and youth development among footballers in Oceania.

The OFC Performance License will provide the OFC with insights about planning, training, testing and monitoring best practices across a range of sport science areas, including strength, conditioning and biomechanics.

Ultimately, the OFC Performance License will leave coaches better equipped to enhance the physical and mental aspects of football players competing at international level.

With the OFC fortunate to have both Australia and New Zealand competing in the men's 2019 FIFA U-17 and the 2019 FIFA U-20 World Cups, the OFC Performance License will offer Oceania's elite youth players scholarships to Aspire Academy, where they will benefit from world-class training, coaching, youth development, performance analysis and sport science facilities.

Aspire Academy's Director General, Ivan Bravo, remarked that this partnership will cement Qatar's global position at the forefront of football development and benefit both parties greatly: "Mr. David Chung, the OFC President, has an ambi-

itious vision for the development of football in the OFC, which will require consistent improvement to the coaching standards. We are honoured to offer our experts, methodologies, programmes and facilities to assist in realising this vision. The OFC is the first of the FIFA Confederations to offer such a license, making this a very important development for us and the Member Associations in Oceania."

David Chung added: "Aspire Academy benefits from a body of staff with a vast knowledge of sports science and high performance. We are delighted that the Academy is willing to share their expertise to benefit players, coaches and teams throughout Oceania and to enhance our knowledge and understanding of football development."

"Teams will be exposed to cutting-edge facilities, a professional environment and conditions that assist them in achieving even greater things on the world stage."

He concluded: "With OFC Education Centres opening across Oceania and the new opportunities for OFC Instructors to improve their knowledge through this partnership, we are excited about what the future holds for our players and coaches."

Established in 2004, Aspire Academy seeks to identify and transform talented young athletes with real potential into world-renowned champions who represent Qatar in national teams across a wide range of sports, particularly in the years leading up to the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar.



A file photo shows David Chung at Aspire Academy.

The 2020 Tour de France to start from Nice

The 2020 Tour de France will start from Nice on France's Cote d'Azur, organisers announced yesterday. The Mediterranean resort plays host to the so-called 'Grand Depart' for the second time after 1981, the year Bernard Hinault claimed the third of his five triumphs. "I reckon that lots of cyclists will greet this news with a big smile," said Tour director Christian Prudhomme. For Nice it will mean a welcome boost in revenue. "The Tour is the third (biggest) international (sports) event and as such means a sizeable economic boost for the whole of the region," said the city's mayor Christian Estrosi. The announcement was made less than 24 hours after the 2018 Paris-Nice stage race was won by young Spaniard Marc Soler. Prudhomme commented: "The last few editions of the Paris-Nice have shown that the variety of landscapes and reliefs in the region adds to the suspense, the attack, the show. "That's precisely what we want to give... to the 2020 Tour." This year's Tour, the jewel in cycling's crown, sets off from the Vendee in the west of France with the 2019 edition beginning in Brussels.

SPOTLIGHT

Top seed Halep battles through, Kvitova cooled off

AFP
Indian Wells, United States

Simona Halep took pride in rallying past 19-year-old Caroline Dolehide at Indian Wells, while Petra Kvitova's remarkable win streak skidded to a halt against another US teen.

World No 1 Halep came from behind to beat Dolehide 1-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 in the third round of the WTA hardcourt tournament, while two-time Wimbledon champion Kvitova had her 14-match winning streak snapped as she lost 6-2, 6-4 to 149th-ranked Amanda Anisimova on Sunday.

The 26-year-old Halep is trying to repeat her success in the California desert in 2015 when she lifted the trophy.

"In the end, I think I was stronger in the legs," Halep said.

"Also when I had to finish the points, I did. I'm really, really happy about this victory. It was tough down there."

The Romanian improved to 16-1 on the season and said her confidence is what keeps her going in tight matches.

"I didn't give up, which is the most important thing," she said. "I never thought that I would lose the match. I just wanted to stay there and to see what is happening. I'm really proud that I could manage this match."

"It was really tough. And for second match of the tournament was amazing match, amazing level, in my opinion."

Halep hit two aces and broke Dolehide's serve five times in the two hour, five minute match. Halep said she likes use the word "proud" and is trying to maintain a positive attitude.

"I haven't used that word before because I was tougher with myself. So now I'm trying to change that and be kinder with myself," she said. "That's why I just give credit to myself and it gives me confidence for the next days."

Halep booked a round-of-16 clash with China's Wang Qiang, who defeated 14th seed Kristina Mladenovic, of France, 6-1, 6-2.

Despite her top ranked status, Halep is still seeking her first career Grand Slam title.

She reached her third Grand Slam final earlier this year at



Petra Kvitova in action during her match against Amanda Anisimova at the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells, California. (AFP)

the Australian Open where she lost to Caroline Wozniacki in three sets. Halep and Wozniacki have taken turns being No 1 this year. Wozniacki took the world number one ranking after winning the Aussie Open but Halep regained it just prior to the Indian Wells event. With her win Sunday over Dolehide, Halep

can keep her top ranking unless Wozniacki wins the title.

Elsewhere, Kvitova had been playing some of the best tennis of her career so it wasn't the kind of third round statement the ninth seed was looking for as she lost in straight sets to the youngest player in the draw.

The 14 straight victories

tied her previous career best which she set in 2011-2012. The 28-year-old Czech came into Indian Wells having won the last two tournaments she played in.

She missed Indian Wells last year recovering from hand injuries inflicted by a knife-wielding burglar at her home in December 2016. Kvitova committed four double faults and had her serve broken five times. The 16-year-old Anisimova, who received a wildcard into the draw, is making her Indian Wells debut. She said it was the biggest win of her career.

"It feels crazy," she said. "In the fourth round she'll face fifth seed Karolina Pliskova, who beat China's Zhang Shuai 7-5, 5-7, 6-3."

Elsewhere, US Open winner Sloane Stephens cruised past wild card Victoria Azarenka in straight sets 6-1, 7-5 in a second round match that was postponed from Saturday night because of rain.

German 10th seed Angelique Kerber and Ekaterina Makarova of Russia stretched their match over two days because of the showers before Kerber prevailed in three sets, 3-6, 6-4, 6-2.

Anisimova speaks out against guns

Rising tennis star Amanda Anisimova has added her voice to the growing chorus of young people in America who are demanding a crackdown on gun owners following the latest school shooting rampage that killed 17 people.

The 16-year-old American said the shooting struck close to home for her because she has a friend that attends the high school in Parkland, Florida, that came under attack by a lone gunman last month. "That's definitely terrible," she said.

"I actually had a friend that goes to that school. It's really close to me. It's really sad what's going on."

Anisimova, who is the youngest player in the tournament, scored one of the biggest upsets of the WTA Tour event on Sunday by beating former two-time Wimbledon champ Petra Kvitova 6-2, 6-4.

Anisimova, who was born in New Jersey but moved to Miami when she was three years old, thinks firearms should be outlawed. "I think that guns should be banned," she told reporters at the southern California tournament.

"That's what my opinion is. I posted that on Twitter. But you should have stricter laws on that for sure."

On Friday, Florida introduced a law that paves the way for some school staff to carry firearms, but Anisimova doesn't think it is a good idea to have high school teachers packing. "I don't think teachers should be having guns in school because I don't think that's a good idea," she said.

Asked how her friend is coping with the grief process, Anisimova said, "She was fine, but, you know, she was there, and so it's definitely something that she has to keep going through. "All of her friends and everything. So it was a tough day for her, but she was fine."

SPOTLIGHT

MotGP season to kick off at Losail Circuit this weekend



Qatar is usually a more difficult venue for reigning champion Marc Marquez and Honda, and will be keen to begin another title defence on the offensive.

The 2018 MotoGP season is nearly here, with Round One to be held at the Grand Prix of Qatar this Friday till Sunday. Ten years have passed since Losail International Circuit hosted the first floodlit MotoGP race. In that time, much has changed but the core of the sport has remained the same.

Foundations laid then and since have created one of the most spectacular eras of Grand Prix motorcycle racing since the Championship began in 1949 and, another season of that rollercoaster is about to begin. Who's your money on?

On the face of it, it's hard to bet against reigning champion Marc Marquez (Repsol Honda Team). The rider from Cervera is now a six-time World Champion and he's taken four premier class crowns in five years.

Qatar is usually a more difficult venue for Marquez and Honda, and although both will want to begin another title defence on the offensive and at the front, it may be a case of good things come to those who wait for Marquez and his teammate Dani Pedrosa, who makes his 200th premier class start – as well as for HRC test rider and Independent Team challenger Cal

Crutchlow (LCR Honda Castrol).

Ducati begin the season with the statistics stacked the opposite way. Losail is a venue that suits the red machines, and Andrea Dovizioso has proven that with a good number of podiums in recent Qatar GPs.

But that was then, and this is now. 'DesmoDovi' is a contender from the start in 2018, and it's not just the podium that Borgo Panigale have in their sights – it's the top step. That would make for a big opening statement from the Italian on the Italian machine.

His teammate Jorge Lorenzo will be looking for similar headlines in his second year in red, too – and it's his pole record that still stands from 2008 when he was a rookie in the premier class. With three wins to his name at the venue in MotoGP, Lorenzo is the second most successful rider at the track on the premier class grid this year – added to another three wins in the lower classes.

Who's the first? The 'Doctor' Movistar Yamaha MotoGP's Valentino Rossi has four MotoGP wins at Losail to Lorenzo's three, and the rider from Tavullia always has some serious form for race day pace in Qatar.

But it's been a difficult pre-season

and latter part of 2017 for the Iwata marque and questions remain – can Rossi answer them? And what of teammate Maverick Viñales? After an awe-some pre-season ahead of 2017 and two

wins to begin the year, the battle became more uphill. Has that been turned around?

Saud al-Attiya, Losail Circuit Sports Club President stated: "The Grand Prix

Ten years have passed since Losail International Circuit hosted the first floodlit MotoGP race. In that time, much has changed but the core of the sport has remained the same

of Qatar is always one of the highlights of the season, not only for being the very first round of this exciting championship but also for our night racing, making our event one of the most exclusive racing weekends of our calendar."

"Our event is also one of the most anticipated races of the season but this 2018 is a milestone and a very special event for us as it marks 15 years of being the Home of Motorsport in Qatar. We are very excited to celebrate this Anniversary in association with Visit Qatar, teams, riders, spectators, fans and all the international motorsport community as we are planning several activities for all those who come to visit us," added al-Attiya.

Rashed al-Qureshi, Chief Marketing & Promotion Officer at Qatar Tourism Authority commented: "Over the past 14 years, MotoGP has cemented its position as a key event on Qatar's sporting and tourism calendars. Through our partnership with LCSC, we hope to help raise the event's profile internationally to spread Qatar's message of welcome to the world and attract more visitors."

He added: "We look forward to welcoming all the riders in Doha and wish them all the success over the coming weekend and a great international race season ahead."

Tickets are still available for the Grandstand, Losail Club Grandstand, Losail VIP Club and VIP Village for QR250, 2,500, 3,500 and 4,500 respectively. The tickets can be purchased at Q-Tickets, Virgin Megastore's in-store or online platforms and at the Losail Circuit Sports Club during the week of the event.

For those who want to live the action from main straight and watch the start, finish and podium ceremonies of the races, there will be a 3-day grandstand ticket with access to the Fan Zone area at the grandstand with entertaining activities for all the family (go-karting, camel riding, falcons, Arabic coffee etc). And children under 11 years accompanied by an adult will have free access to this grandstand.

The MotoGP Free Practice begins at 2:45pm on Friday. Then when the sun goes down on Sunday, the lights go out at 7pm for the main race.



Movistar Yamaha's Valentino Rossi has four MotoGP wins at Losail, and the rider from Tavullia always has some serious form for race day pace in Qatar.

BOTTOMLINE

Doha Pest Control, Nakheel reach Workers Cup final

Doha Pest Control defeated Al Asmakh FM 8-7 on penalties in the first semi-final of the Sixth Workers Cup. The tie-breaker was enforced after the teams played out a 1-1 draw after 90 minutes of regulation time at the Al Duhail Stadium on Friday.

In the other semis played at the same venue, holders Nakheel put it across ALYSJ 4-2, also in tie-breaker, after they were locked 1-1 at full time. Al Asmakh took the lead in the 21st minute through Shehu when a defensive mix-up between Samuel, Patrick Owusu and Joseph Gyasi saw him race through on goal. And Shehu made no mistake.

However, Doha Pest Control recovered well to dominate the proceedings for most of the match. Their efforts bore fruit in the

43rd minute when Dennis met a great cross from Samuel Kofi with a header past Denis Ofori of Al Asmakh.

The score stayed level and the game moved to penalties. In the shoot-out, neither goalkeeper saved the first five kicks. Both teams then matched each other right until sudden death when a brilliant save from Doha Pest Control keeper gave his side the chance to head for the final.

In the second last-four clash, ALYSJ's dream run in the tournament, organised by the Qatar Stars League and sponsored by Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, suffered penalty agony.

Nakheel were vastly superior to ALYSJ over the course of the game, but the resilience and organisation that swiftly became

the trademark of ALYSJ throughout the competition took an enthralling game to penalties.

Mohammed Ait Braik put Nakheel ahead in the 28th minute, only to see ALYSJ draw level through Ibrahim Makido in the 45th.

As in the other semi-final, both sides entered the crucial phase, but it was ALYSJ who were left heartbroken. Vincent and Ibrahim were successful from the spot, but Ali Awadu struck the bar and Mustafa's effort was saved by Nakheel goalkeeper Anasse Youssef. The third-place play-off, between Al Asmakh FM and ALYSJ, is scheduled for 16th March and final for 23rd March at the Al Duhail Stadium. Matches are played on Fridays in the tournament that started on 2nd February. Entry is free for the public.



Action from the Workers Cup semi-final

FOCUS

QFA signs agreements with Jordan, Lebanon and Syrian football federations

QNA
Amman

President of the Qatar Football Association (QFA) Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani signed agreements with the Jordanian, Lebanese, and Syrian federations with the aim of strengthening ties in football.

The agreements reflected the Qatari association's commitment in exchanging expertise and improving the level of football both regionally and internationally.

The first agreement was signed in Beirut with president of Lebanon's Football Association Hashem Haidar. The two held a press conference stressing their commitment to enhancing football ties for a very long time.

The president of QFA said the Lebanese association will gain a lot from the agreement, given the great development QFA has witnessed recently. Sheikh Hamad expressed his hope that QFA can successfully exchange its expertise with many associations.

The second agreement was signed with the Jordanian association. President of the Jordan Football Association Prince Ali bin al-Husseini said the agreement is a reflection of the strong understanding between the Qatari and Jordanian associations. He paid tribute to the president of QFA for his efforts in improving the level of football generally.



President of the Qatar Football Association Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani (right) with Lebanon's Football Association chief Hashem Haidar in Beirut.

The third agreement was signed with President of the Syrian Association Salah Ramadan. The final two agreements were signed on the sidelines of the meeting of the executive committee of the West Asia Football Federation.