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# GULF TIMES SPORT

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QNB STARS LEAGUE

# Wakrah rally to stun Duhail 4-2 in their season opener

Al Shamal beat Al Rayyan 1-0 to start campaign on a strong note

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Al Wakrah rallied from being a goal down to beat last season's runners-up Al Duhail 4-2 in their QNB Stars League season opener match at the Education City Stadium yesterday.

The match was tied 1-1 at half-time.

While the goals for Al Duhail came from Murad Naji (own goal 15th minute) and Michael Olunga (50th minute), Al Wakrah scored through Trent Sainsbury (45th minute), Jacinto Dala (54th and 90th minutes) and Omid Ebrahimi (68th-minute penalty).

Having suffered an early setback, when Murad Naji while trying to cut off an Al Duhail cross erred and put the ball into his own goal, Al Wakrah rallied superbly to counter charged-up Red Knights.

Just before half-time, Al Wakrah's latest acquisition Australian Trent Sainsbury (who has played for a number of clubs in Australia, Holland, Italy, China and Belgium) showed his class by making a beautiful header being left unmarked.

Sainsbury was fed with the perfect ball from a corner kick by Murad, making amends for his earlier mistake.

The match went into an overdrive straight up in the second half, with Al Duhail's Kenyan striker Olunga scoring with a header after being provided with a superb long left-foot pass by Belgian winger Edmilson Junior from outside the box, making it 2-1.

Minutes later, Al Wakrah equalised when Angolan Jacinto "Gelson" Dala made the most of a lapse from Al Duhail cap-



Al Wakrah's Jacinto Dala (centre) vying for the ball with Al Duhail players during their QNB Stars League match yesterday.

tain Luiz Martin Junior in the midfield. Martin failed to control the ball while receiving a pass and Dala latched on to the chance running into the penalty area where he dribbled past three players to score (2-2).

Al Wakrah regained the lead when Dala made a cross to substitute Ismail Mahmoud, but his

shot was staved off by an agile Al Duhail goalkeeper Mohamed al-Bakri. Al Wakrah's Omid Ebrahimi was then tackled by Luiz Martin from behind stepping on to his shoe and referee Abdulrahman al-Jassim signalled to the spot. Ebrahimi coolly scored the penalty shooting into the right corner (3-2).

The joy for Al Wakrah was doubled towards the end when Dala returned to benefit from another defensive lapse. Cutting off from a Ferjani Sassi cross, Dala ran all the way with the ball at ease to beat the goalkeeper, much to the delight of his team and the fans to make the final score read 4-2.



Action from Al Shamal-Al Rayyan match.

In the second match of the day Al Shamal defeated Al Rayyan 1-0 at the Al Sadd Stadium.

Substitute Mohamed El Sayed (Jeddo) scored the all-important goal in the 86th minute. The first half was goalless, but saw some exciting moments including a VAR check penalty to Al Rayyan after 40 minutes which was later cancelled by referee Abdulla Ali Athba after re-confirming. The VAR check was a result after Tameem Mansour of Al Rayyan was checked by Loic Landre of Al Shamal just

on the edge of the box, but it seemed outside the line. Yohan Boli had stepped up to take the spot kick, but the referee called it off rightly.

In the 46th minute, Abdelaziz Metwali of Al Shamal was flashed with a yellow card for his wrong tackle against a charging Boli. In the 61st minute, Al Rayyan's French star Steven Nzonzi's header was well held by rival goalkeeper Babacar Seck.

Soon, Al Rayyan's Ahmed Yasser was hamstrung while moving in menacingly inside

the box. He was substituted by Khaled Muftah. In the 73rd minute, Matias Nani's header was stopped from going in by goalkeeper Seck, who stretched to his right to make the save.

The winning moment for Al Shamal arrived when, after a fine move, El Sayed safely sent the ball into the goal.

Al Rayyan tried hard in the dying minutes and one potential strike of Boli was well headed off by Ali Olwan of Al Shamal to ensure valuable three points for the team.

## CAPTAIN JAHANBAKSH SAYS IRAN WILL AIM QATAR 2022 SECOND ROUND

Iran football captain **Alireza Jahanbakhsh** said their first aim is entry into the round of 16 of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. "We have never made it to the round of 16, so that is our biggest aim, but we play in one of the toughest groups with England, the US and Wales. But if I want to say my dream, it would be to do our best first, then to make it to the second round. That's what's on our minds," Jahanbakhsh said.

The 28-year-old Jahanbakhsh, who played in Brazil 2014 and Russia 2018 editions of the tournament, is excited about his third World Cup finals appearance. Iran came close to making the second round in the last World Cup.

"The excitement of the World Cup doesn't change and no matter how often you experience it, it is always the same. I still think and feel the same and look forward to it as I did at the age of 19 back in 2014. I'm looking forward to it and hopefully I can represent my country in the best way possible and make our na-

tion proud," he said. "My earliest World Cup memory was actually our crazy qualification for France 1998 against Australia. When I started playing football, I would never have thought I would play in the World Cup, let alone three times. But it will not only be me making it to a third World Cup with Iran hopefully. It's not something I expected, but it is something I worked hard for. It was always one of my biggest dreams whenever I wore the national team jersey," the Feyenoord player said. "Representing your country at a World Cup is big matter, and to have that experience twice and headed towards the third hopefully, that is a massive achievement for me. For my family, for my friends and everyone who supported me. The route for the Asia's top-ranked team at the Khalifa International Stadium, where Jahanbakhsh is set to line up against many of the names he faced in his three years at Brighton and Hove Albion, a difficult time in the life of a player whose

highlight was scoring a Premier League Goal of the Month with an exquisite bicycle-kick against Chelsea in January 2020. Jahanbakhsh, who had played for Brighton & Hove Albion in the English Premier League, said he was looking forward to the Group C game against England. "I played against many of this England team during my time there," he said. "Plenty of quality players! They can easily field three different World Cup teams. They have three to four world-class players in every position, so they are one of the favourites to win the World Cup and that says enough about this team and the quality they have as a team and individually. "We are going to do our best and that's the most important thing. It's the same situation with USA and Wales - they have a lot of good players who will come to do their best at the World Cup." Four years earlier, Iran found themselves in the so-called group of death alongside Iberian duo Spain and Portugal and Morocco. Jahanbakhsh and



company proved they were no pushovers, holding Portugal to a draw and beating Morocco. A missed Taremi chance against

Rui Patricio was the difference between first-phase elimination and the Round of 16, and Jahanbakhsh believes reaching

that milestone is inevitable for his country. "Last World Cup we were quite close," he said. "Portugal and Spain went through with five points and we just missed out with four. Nobody expected us to do this well, but we were united as a team. I think we did quite a good job in all three games and were unlucky not to make it to the next round from such a difficult group. "We have the same ambition now, to work hard for our nation as a team. We know millions of Iranians back home and around the world are looking forward to seeing us performing and making them proud. You never know. It's such a tough group we are in, but we will work hard and do our best to achieve big things in Qatar. "We are having one of our best generations and the boys have been playing together for a very long time. Realistically our aim is to be at every World Cup, but we have to change our aim to not be content with just qualifying. We

made it three times in a row, but making it to the next round is our aim now. It is not just England that will stand in Iran's way come November. A replay of that 1998 clash against USA at Al Thumama Stadium could prove the decider on the final matchday of Group B, and for Jahanbakhsh, the challenge of facing the likes of Christian Pulisic, Giovanni Reyna and Weston McKennie is a totally different type of challenge to that faced by Daei and Co 24 years ago. "It is quite a big thing for our country to play in the World Cup, but in this game, we think of nothing beyond that," he said. "I think the biggest difference compared to 1998 is the generations. Now we have one of the best generations in the history of Iranian football, and for the US it's the same thing, they've got a lot of quality players individually playing in top European leagues and performing well. So I think the level of USMNT now is very different than 24 years ago, and so are we. (Agencies)

SPORT

TENNIS

# Kyrgios cruises in his first match since Wimbledon

Andrey Rublev, seeking 4th title of the season, advanced to the third round by defeating Jack Draper 6-4, 6-2

AFP  
Washington

**W**imbledon runner-up Nick Kyrgios won in his first match since making his Grand Slam final debut, ripping American Marcos Giron 6-3, 6-2 on Tuesday at the ATP and WTA Washington Open.

The 27-year-old Australian fired 12 aces and saved the lone break point he faced to oust Giron in 59 minutes for a triumphant return at the US Open hardcourt tune-up.

After a 3-3 start, Kyrgios won nine of the last 11 games for the victory despite memories of a poor effort in a first-round exit last year during "a dark time in my life."

"I just really wanted to force myself to have high energy and pull out a performance," Kyrgios said. "My confidence was a bit low coming out just because just being on that court again. I got disgraced last year first round, and it was tough to stomach."

"I'm proud of my performance today. It wasn't easy."

World number 63 Kyrgios, whose most recent title came at Washington in 2019, booked a second-round match against US 14th seed Tommy Paul.

Kyrgios said he has struggled to move on after his Wimbledon final loss to Novak Djokovic last



Nick Kyrgios of Australia plays a shot against Marcos Giron of the US during Day 4 of the Citi Open at Rock Creek Tennis Centre in Washington DC. **Right:** Andrey Rublev of Russia returns a shot against Jack Draper of Denmark at the Citi Open. (AFP)



month. "That match hurts," Kyrgios said.

"To have that opportunity and come up short wasn't easy for me to stomach."

"It was hard. I feel like a Grand Slam final doesn't come around so often for us normal players. That was like the golden opportunity."

"I'm doing all the right things to put myself in that position again. I don't think we thought it was possible to contend for

Grand Slams, but now it's a genuine thing."

A hearing in Australia on common assault charges against Kyrgios from a January 2021 incident had originally been scheduled for Tuesday but last month was moved to August 23, six days before the start of the US Open.

"I've got people in my corner and my team dealing with those things. They are out of my control," Kyrgios said. "All I can do is just continue to work and keep

my head down and do what I love to do every day."

Top seed Andrey Rublev advanced to the third round by defeating Britain's Jack Draper 6-4, 6-2.

World number eight Rublev dispatched the 81st-ranked English left-hander in 83 minutes without surrendering a break.

Rublev will play for a quarter-final berth today against an American, either Jack Sock or Maxime Cressy.

Rublev, 24, seeks his fourth ATP title of the year and the 12th of his career after crowns at Marseille and Dubai in February and Belgrade in April.

Rublev, who wrote "No War Please" on a camera lens at Dubai, was among Russian players banned from Wimbledon because of his homeland's military invasion of Ukraine.

"There's nothing more important than to have peace and love all around the world," Rublev

said. "I do believe that by being united and doing good things for the peace, if tennis will be example of it, maybe other sports will follow and maybe one day sport can be without politics."

Reigning US Open champion Emma Raducanu, the 19-year-old British second seed, reached the second round by defeating American Louisa Chirico 6-4, 6-2. World number 10 Raducanu won her first match since a second-round Wimbledon exit

to book a last-16 match against Colombia's Maria Camila Osorio.

Former world number one Victoria Azarenka, a two-time Australian Open champion and three-time US Open runner-up, beat Ukraine's Dayana Yastremska 6-4, 6-0.

American Mackenzie McDonald, the 2021 Washington runner-up, lost his opener 1-6, 6-4, 6-4 to Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori, who meets Polish second seed Hubert Hurkacz next.

SPOTLIGHT

# Osaka makes winning return, set to face Gauff

AFP  
Los Angeles

**F**our-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka made a triumphant return from a two-month layoff by defeating Chinese teen Zheng Qinwen on Tuesday at the WTA San Jose hardcourt tournament.

The 24-year-old Japanese star outlasted the gritty 19-year-old 6-4, 3-6, 6-1 in a first-round match at the US Open tune-up tournament.

Osaka had not played a competitive match since losing in the first round of the French Open due to a left Achilles tendon injury.

"It's really cool to be back playing," Osaka said after the victory.

"I haven't played since May. I didn't know that. Somebody told me that. It's really good to be back."

Former world number one Osaka, whose ranking has slid to 41st, will play for a quarter-final berth against 18-year-old American sixth seed Coco Gauff, this year's French Open runner-up.

Gauff routed Ukraine's An-



Naomi Osaka of Japan speaks with the referee during her match against Qinwen Zheng of China during the Mubadala Silicon Valley Classic at Spartan Tennis Complex in San Jose, California. (AFP)

helina Kalinina 6-1, 6-0 in 54 minutes.

Osaka's match marked the return of her father, Leonard Francois, as her coach.

Osaka had been working with Wim Fissette for the past two years.

"It's good for him to be back because he always makes me smile," Osaka said. "It's just good to be back so I'm really happy."

In the first set of her return match, Osaka broke Zheng for a 2-1 lead, saved a break point to hold in the fourth game and held from there to capture the first set after 45 minutes with a service winner.

World number 51 Zheng broke for a 5-3 edge in the second set and held at love on a service winner to force a third set.

Osaka broke twice for a 4-0 lead in the final set, denied

Zheng's fightback bid with a second-serve ace on a break point and held for a 5-0 lead.

After Zheng held, Osaka did the same to capture the match on a service winner after two hours and two minutes.

Reigning Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan lost Monday in her first match since capturing her first major title, falling to 12th-ranked Daria Kasatkina.

ATP/WTA WASHINGTON OPEN RESULTS - COLLATED

**Results from Tuesday's second day of the ATP and WTA Washington Open (x denotes seed; players representing Russia and Belarus are banned from competing under the name or flag of their countries):**

**Men Second Round**  
A. Rublev (x1) bt Jack Draper (GBR) 6-4, 6-2  
D. Evans (GBR x16) bt Kyle Edmund (GBR) 6-1, 6-2  
K. Khachanov (x7) bt D. Koepfer (GER) 6-7 (3/7), 7-5, 6-4  
B. van de Zandschulp (NED x8) bt B. Gojo (CRO) 7-6 (8/6), 6-7 (5/7), 6-4

**First Round**  
J. Sock (USA) bt D. Goffin (BEL) 7-6 (7/4), 6-4  
Y. Nishioka (JPN) bt J. Brooksby (USA) 6-4, 6-3  
C. Eubanks (USA) bt B. Bonzi (FRA) 3-6, 6-3, 7-5

N. Kyrgios (AUS) bt M. Giron (USA) 6-3, 6-2  
S. Korda (USA) bt I. Ivashka 6-4, 7-6 (7/5)  
E. Ruusuvuori (FIN) bt M. McDonald (USA) 1-6, 6-4, 6-4

**Women First Round**  
A. Petkovic (GER) bt C. Tauson (DEN x8) 6-2, 6-2  
A. Kalinskaya bt M. Brengle (USA) 6-3, 6-0  
W. Xiyu (CHN) bt T. Maria (GER) 6-2, 7-5  
T. Martincova (CZE) bt W. Xinyu (CHN) 0-6, 6-4, 6-4  
V. Azarenka (BLR x4) bt D. Yastremska (UKR) 6-4, 6-0  
A. Tomljanovic (AUS) bt S. Stephens (USA) 6-1, 6-4  
M. Camila Osorio (COL) bt S. Kenin (USA) 7-6 (7/2), 6-1  
E. Raducanu (GBR x2) bt L. Chirico 6-4, 6-2

FOCUS

# Kyrgios has a 'totally different mindset' since Wimbledon

Reuters  
Washington

**A** couple of years ago Nick Kyrgios would have struggled for motivation following a big result at a Grand Slam but the Australian said his mindset is completely different following his runner-up finish at Wimbledon last month.

He breezed past Marcos Giron 6-3 6-2 in under an hour on Tuesday at the Washington Open in his first singles match since going down to Novak Djokovic in his maiden Grand Slam final at Wimbledon.

"I'm playing for a lot more than myself, and I feel like I'm just in a totally different mindset," Kyrgios told reporters. "I think a couple years ago, after having a great Grand Slam result, I think I would have struggled to find motivation, obviously prob-

ably a bit more selfish. But now I feel like I had some time off in Bahamas, but I was still forcing myself to train every day. Coming to these tournaments in shape and ready to go ... I just have so much motivation at the moment."

Kyrgios said he found it difficult to deal with the defeat to Djokovic, who won his seventh Wimbledon title and 21st major overall when he rallied to a 4-6 6-3 6-4 7-6(3) win.

"I think ever since I picked up a tennis racket I had coaches in my ear saying the Wimbledon trophy is the highest accolade you can achieve in the sport," he said. "To have that opportunity and come up short wasn't easy for me to stomach."

But the Australian was confident he will have more chances at major glory. "I don't think we thought it was possible to contend for Grand Slams, but now it's a genuine thing," he said. "I think (it's) all about motivation and we are on the same page."

# BAIRSTOW PULLS OUT OF HUNDRED TO REST AHEAD OF SOUTH AFRICA SERIES

**London:** Dashing batter Jonny Bairstow has withdrawn from the controversial Hundred tournament in order to make sure he is fresh for England's upcoming three-Test series at home to South Africa. Bairstow was named in the England squad announced Tuesday for the first two Tests of a series that starts at Lord's on August 17. England and South Africa meet again at Manchester's Old Trafford before returning to London for the third Test at the Oval commencing on September 8.

England also have a congested post-season touring schedule, particularly for multi-format international such as Bairstow, with series in Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand and Bangladesh, in addition to the Twenty20 World Cup. Bairstow, 32, was due to represent the Cardiff franchise Welsh Fire in the second season of the Hundred - English domestic cricket's fledgling 100 balls per side competition - with the side facing champions Southern Brave at Southampton yesterday.



"I'm really disappointed I won't be part of The Hundred this year," said Bairstow. "I loved it last year, but I've had a hectic few months with the schedule as it is and I really need to take a breather before the South Africa Test series. "All the best to the Welsh Fire men and women - I'll be cheering you on."

CRICKET

# Naseem replaces Hasan for Asia Cup

Reuters  
Lahore

**P**akistan have dropped seamer Hasan Ali and replaced him with teenage fast bowler Naseem Shah in their Twenty20 squad for the Asia Cup, which begins in Dubai on Aug. 27.

Naseem has played 13 Tests but the 19-year-old pacer is yet to play a limited-overs international for Pakistan. He has also been preferred for a three-match one-day series in the Netherlands preceding the Asia Cup.

"Hasan has been given a break from international cricket and he has been replaced by Naseem Shah," chief selector Mohamed Wasim said after announcing the squads yesterday.

"He (Naseem) is express fast and can give further impetus to the fast bowling depart-

ment, which already boasts Haris Rauf, Mohamed Wasim junior, Shaheen Afridi and Shah Nawaz Dahani.

"Naseem has not played any international white-ball cricket, but he has demonstrated with the red ball that he is an attacking option with good pace and controlled swing."

Pace spearhead Afridi, who suffered a knee injury in Sri Lanka last month, has been named in both squads but medical staff would determine when he can return to action, the Pakistan Cricket Board said.

Babar Azam's team will begin their Asia Cup campaign on Aug. 28 against arch-rivals India in a Sunday blockbuster in Dubai.

**Pakistan squad**

Babar Azam (captain), Shadab Khan, Asif Ali, Fakhar Zaman, Haider Ali, Haris Rauf, Iftikhar Ahmed, Khushdil Shah, Mohamed Nawaz, Mohamed Rizwan (wicketkeeper), Mohamed Wasim junior, Naseem Shah,

Shaheen Afridi, Shah Nawaz Dahani and Usman Qadir

**INDIA CAPTAIN ROHIT HOPES TO BE FIT FOR FOURTH T20**

India captain Rohit Sharma is optimistic he will be fit for Saturday's fourth Twenty20 International against West Indies after suffering a back spasm in their seven-wicket victory in Basseterre on Tuesday.

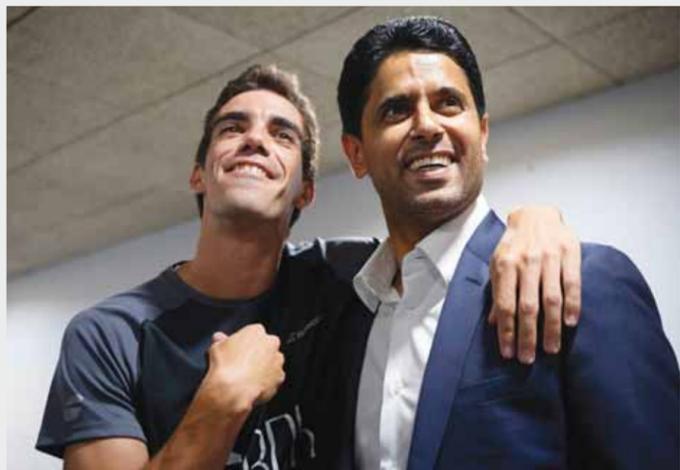
Rohit retired hurt on 11 in the second over of the Indian innings after experiencing discomfort. India still chased down the victory target with one over to spare after opener Suryakumar Yadav smashed 76 to put the visitors 2-1 ahead in the five-match series.

"It is okay at the moment," Rohit said. "We've got a few days between (now and) the next game, so hopefully I should be okay."

The teams move to Lauderdale, Florida, for the last two matches.



## NASSER AL-KHELAIFI ATTENDS MADRID PREMIER PADEL TOURNAMENT



Nasser al-Khelaifi, President of Paris Saint-Germain and Chairman of Qatar Sports Investments, the founding partner of Premier Padel, attended the Madrid Premier Padel P1 tournament on Tuesday - the second day of the main draw of the tournament. Al-Khelaifi watched matches with Luigi Carraro, FIP President, and also met with Premier Padel players. Among the pairings that have advanced to the next round are P. Lima (BRA) / F. Stupaczuk (ARG), F. Chingotto (ARG) / J. Tello (ARG), F. Belasteguain (ARG) / A. Coello (ESP), M. Di Nanno (ARG) / F. Navarro (ESP) and top seeds A. Galan (ESP) and Lebron (ESP).

### FOOTBALL

# Premier League clubs to stop taking knee before every match

PLAYERS BEGAN TAKING THE KNEE AT THE START OF EVERY GAME IN JUNE 2020, JUST A MONTH AFTER THE KILLING IN THE US OF GEORGE FLOYD

AFP

London

English Premier League football players said yesterday they will no longer take the knee before every match in the upcoming season, following criticism that the anti-racism gesture was losing its impact.

In a Premier League statement, club captains said that instead, they would bend before selected games, "and in so doing we continue to show solidarity for a common cause".

The league said it supported the captains' decision, and would elevate anti-racism messaging as part of its "No Room for Racism" campaign - words that already feature on players' sleeves. Premier League players began taking the knee at the start of every game in June 2020, when the season resumed following a Covid shutdown, a month after the killing in the United States of George Floyd.

Ex-NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick started kneeling to protest against racial injustice in 2016, and the gesture has become a familiar sight across a range of sports since Floyd's murder by a US police officer.

But several Premier League players queried its continuing relevance - and some right-wing politicians in Britain have criticised its identification with the Black Lives Matter protest movement.

Wilfried Zaha, a black striker for Crystal Palace, was an early dissident, labelling the gesture "degrading" and opting to stand instead.

Last season, Chelsea's white defender Marcos Alonso decided to stand and point instead to the anti-racism badge on his shirt sleeve. Alonso's then team-mate Romelu Lukaku said football had



Chelsea's Hakim Ziyech and Chelsea's Kai Havertz take a knee before their EPL match against Watford at the Stamford Bridge in London on May 22, 2022. (Reuters)

to take "stronger" action in the fight against racism, with abuse still rife against black footballers on social media.

"Yeah, we are taking the knee... but sometimes after the game, you see another insult," Lukaku told CNN Sport in September last year.

#### CULTURE WARS

But former Manchester United and England defender Gary Neville criticised the decision.

"It was the most public demonstration to young people in this country that their heroes were fighting inequality," he wrote on Twitter.

"It's something my 12 + 13 year old would comment on/notice before each game. Back to

wearing T-shirts once a season it is then!" he added. Rather than every match, Premier League players now intend to take the knee at this weekend's opening round of the season, and before dedicated "No Room for Racism" match rounds in October and March.

The captains said they will also observe it before Boxing Day fixtures, on the final day of the season, and before the FA Cup and League Cup finals.

"We remain resolutely committed to eradicate racial prejudice, and to bring about an inclusive society with respect and equal opportunities for all," they said in the statement.

Sales of "No Room For Racism" sleeve badges on rep-

lica shirts last season raised £119,000 (\$145,000) in royalties for the clubs. They are donating that sum to designated youth teams, with the Premier League matching the amount, according to the statement. The players' gesture has been generally respected by fans before matches.

But sections of the crowd at England games booed the players when they took the knee, prompting an angry response from the national team manager Gareth Southgate.

Piara Powar, head of anti-discrimination organisation the Fare Network, told AFP last year that taking the knee was still a meaningful act even if it had become embroiled in a "culture war-type debate".

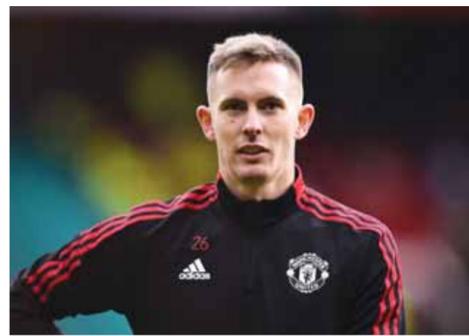
"It is something that is impactful," he said. "If it wasn't impactful, people wouldn't be booing it."

But the Championship, the second tier of top-flight English football, has already started its season with Bristol City and Swansea City both saying their players would no longer take the knee. The act had become diluted, the clubs said, and the Professional Footballers' Association said its members did not want the gesture to become "routine, so that it potentially loses its impact".

"We've spoken to players about this and what we've heard is that they want to find a balance," the players' union chief executive Maheta Molango said.

### FOCUS

## Henderson 'fuming' over lack of playing time at Man United



Reuters

London

Goalkeeper Dean Henderson said he was "fuming" at the lack of playing time for Manchester United last season and that the last 12 months had been the toughest of his career.

The 25-year-old, who joined newly promoted Nottingham Forest on loan last month, made three appearances for United last season and was unable to displace David de Gea as first-choice goalkeeper.

Henderson looked to be on the verge of breaking into United's first team last year, having made 26 appearances for the club in the 2020-21 season and receiving a call-up to England's European Championship squad in June.

However, he was forced to withdraw from the England squad with a hip injury and then tested positive for Covid-19 weeks before the start of the 2021-22 season, due to which he suffered from prolonged fatigue.

"To be honest, it has probably been the toughest 12 months of my career," Henderson told TalkSport on Tuesday.

"The conversation I had coming out of the Euros squad was: 'You're coming back here to be the number one.'"

"I got Covid-19, came back, so I should have still been the number one but then nobody followed through with what they had told me. It was frustrating, because I turned down so many good loans last summer for that reason, and they would not let me go.

"To sit there for 12 months, it is criminal really, at my age. I was fuming. I told the hier-

archy that I need to be playing football and to let me go, and I was almost gone before the manager (Erik ten Hag) came through the door. I have not spoken to him since."

Forest begin their Premier League campaign with a trip to Newcastle United on August 6.

#### Ronaldo's early exit from United game 'unacceptable': Ten Hag

Erik ten Hag said it was "unacceptable" for Cristiano Ronaldo and other Manchester United players to leave Old Trafford before the end of Sunday's friendly against Rayo Vallecano.

After taking a strong team to Oslo to face Atletico Madrid on Saturday, United wrapped up their pre-season preparations against another Spanish side the following day.

United drew 1-1 with Rayo at Old Trafford as star man Ronaldo made his first appearance of pre-season, playing the first 45 minutes.

The 37-year-old missed the pre-season tour of Thailand and Australia due to a family issue, and the wantaway forward was pictured with Diogo Dalot leaving Sunday's game before full-time.

Ten Hag did not speak to the media after the match but has now expressed his annoyance to broadcaster Viaplay.

"There were many more (as well as Ronaldo) who went home," the United boss said.

"This is unacceptable for everyone," he said. "I tell them that it's unacceptable, that we are a team, a squad and that you should stay until the end."

Ten Hag will take charge of his first competitive match as United manager on Sunday, when they face Brighton at home in the Premier League.

## ARTETA SAYS CHILDHOOD HEART SURGERY SHAPED HIS CAREER

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said yesterday that he underwent open heart surgery as a two-year-old and that the operation allowed him to go on to become a professional footballer.

In last week's trailer for the Amazon Prime Video series "All or Nothing," which will cover Arsenal's 2021-22 season, Arteta can be seen telling players about the surgery in a dressing room chat.

He told the BBC: "I was born with a big heart issue that they could not resolve until I was two-years-old because I was too little.

They had to open my heart and go through it. It was one of the first surgeries that was done in that way in Spain, so we didn't know how it was going to end up.

Everything developed in a normal way and I was able to fulfil my dream to be a professional footballer."

When asked if the experience had shaped him in his youth, Arteta, who played for Everton and Arsenal in the Premier League, said, "I think it did in a way. When I was younger, I was told you cannot do that, you cannot expose yourself so much, we cannot take you to the limit of your heart capacity. I was always pushing myself to the limit."

#### NORWAY APPOINT HEGE RIISE AS WOMEN'S NATIONAL TEAM COACH

The Norwegian Football Federation (NFF) has appointed Hege Riise to take over as coach of the women's national team fol-

lowing their group stage exit from the European Championship. Riise, who won the World Cup, European Championship and an Olympic gold medal as a player, would be presented at a news conference later yesterday, the NFF said in a statement. Riise, who coached Britain's women's team at the Tokyo Olympics, replaces Swede Martin Sjogren, who departed the role swiftly after his side suffered an 8-0 defeat against Euro 2022 hosts and eventual winners England. No details of the length of the 53-year-old Riise's contract were announced.

#### PERU TURN TO REYNOSO FOR 2026 WORLD CUP MISSION

Former Peru international Juan Reynoso

was handed the task Tuesday of qualifying the country for the 2026 World Cup after being named as the successor to Ricardo Gareca.

Reynoso, 52, takes over on a four-year deal following Peru's loss on penalties against Australia in a June play-off that cost them a place at the World Cup in Qatar.

He will officially be presented on Wednesday, the Peruvian football federation said. Reynoso won 84 caps for Peru and guided Cruz Azul to the Mexican title last year. Gareca left his job after seven years in charge.

The Argentine coach led Peru to the 2018 World Cup in Russia, the country's first appearance at the tournament in 36 years.

## Qatar register fourth win at GCC U-18 Basketball



Qatar defeated Saudi Arabia 79-55 to register their fourth successive win in the GCC U-18 Basketball Championship at the Al Wasl Club in the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday. In other matches of the day, Kuwait beat Bahrain 64-47 and hosts the UAE defeated Oman 57-45.