



ATHLETICS | Page 3

High jump legend Dick Fosbury dies at 76



FOOTBALL | Page 4

Man City reign will be defined by Champions League: Pep

Tuesday, March 14, 2023
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GULF TIMES

SPORT

CRICKET

Williamson leads New Zealand to last-ball win over Sri Lanka

Page 2

QNB STARS LEAGUE

Msakni penalty earns Arabi important win over Gharafa

Qatar SC climb to fourth in the table after a come-from-behind 3-1 win over Al Ahli; Umm Salal beat Al Shamal

By Sports Reporter

Doha

A 38th-minute penalty by Youssef Msakni helped Al Arabi beat Al Gharafa 1-0 in the QNB Stars League yesterday. Victory at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium kept Arabi in touch with leaders Al Duhail, who have two points cushion at the top and also have played a game less. Arabi were forced to play with 10 men from the 67th-minute after Abdullah Marafee was shown a red card but they managed to see out the game.

Meanwhile, Qatar SC climbed to fourth in the table after a come-from-behind 3-1 win over Al Ahli at the Hamad bin Khalifa Stadium. Ahli took the lead towards the end of first half before Qatar SC rallied to score all their goals in the second half for a much-needed victory. While Hossein Kanaani scored for Ahli in the 44th minute, Qatar SC's scorers were Badr Benoun (72nd minute), Eisa Ahmed (77th minute) and Under-20 substitute Raoul Sanda (90+8 minute).

Both teams began the battle sprightly and Qatar SC's Javier Martinez produced a menacing header in the sixth minute, but Al Ahli goalkeeper Yazan Naim jumped high to stave off the threat with his outstretched hand. Qatar SC made a few more raids, but were still unsuccessful.

Ahli then struck when Kanaani produced a fine header off a corner kick from Aboubakr Mohamed Bayoumi, which flew into the left corner of the net. Rattled Qatar SC then looked to make amends and in the added time of opening half, Sebastian Soria did break through to score, but was offside.

The hard efforts of Qatar SC paid them dividends late into the second half with Benoun replying with a superb header to the top right of the net from a dead ball kick of Bashar Resan.



Al Arabi's Youssef Msakni converts a penalty against Al Gharafa at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium yesterday.

Qatar SC did not have to wait long to consolidate their lead as Palangi made a good left foot kick even while losing balance off a cross from Soria.

Ahli stepped up their efforts to find an equaliser, but were again left shocked in the dying moments as the young Sanda launched a counter-attack picking on a long ball to dash for a fine field goal. He was assisted by Khaled Walid on the way as he returned a perfect cross.

Earlier at the Thani Bin Jassim Sta-

dium, Umm Salal recorded a valuable 1-0 win over Al Shamal thanks to Adel Alawi strike in the stoppage time. Umm Salal, who are 11th in the table raised their tally to 13 points, just one behind Shamal, who are ninth. Shamal's Jassim al-Hashemi was sent off in 90+10 minute after receiving a second yellow card.

The match started off strongly and Umm Salal's Yassin al-Bakhit almost scored in the fifth minute, but Shamal

goalkeeper Babacar Seck blocked the ball. Play was confined to the midfield and Umm Salal's Al Bakhit passed a ball in the 19th minute to Joao Teixeira, who hit it over the crossbar. At the beginning of second half, intense attempts were made especially by Umm Salal. They came close to scoring again in the 54th minute, but the Al Shamal defence and goalkeeper dealt with it.

Shamal too had their chances and, in the 59th minute, Amjad Atwan hit

Amir Cup quarters, semis set for next month

Doha: The quarter-finals and semi-finals of the 51st Amir Cup will be played next month, the Qatar Football Association (QFA) announced yesterday.

The last-eight round matches will be held for four successive days, with Al Arabi facing second division side Muaither at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium on April 8. The next day, Al Gharafa take Al Shahania at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, which will also host the clash between defending champions Al Du-

hail and Al Sailiya on April 10. The final quarter-final clash will be between Al Sadd and Umm Salal on April 11 at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium.

All the quarter-finals, which are falling during the holy month of Ramadan, will kick off at 9:45pm. The QFA yesterday also announced the schedule of the semi-finals which will be played on April 24 and 25 with kick-off time set for 6:45pm. The venue and date of the final is yet to be announced.



Qatar SC and Al Ahli players scuffle during the QNB Stars League match at the Hamad Bin Khalifa Stadium. **PICTURE:** Noushad Thekkayil

his shot against the post as he tested Umm Salal goalkeeper of Khalifa Abubakr. Even as both teams tried hard for

a breakthrough, Umm Salal succeeded in getting it as Al Bakhit provided Alawi with a cross to find the target.

SPOTLIGHT

Strength in depth across all motorcycles classes at Qatar Baja

By Sports Reporter

Lusail

In terms of numbers and strength in depth across the different classes, this week's Qatar International Baja is the largest ever to be hosted by the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) since 33 bikes tackled the event back in November 2004, with victory on that occasion falling to UAE-based German rider Tim Trenker on a KTM.

This week, 51 motorcycles and four quads grace the entry list for the second round of the 2023 FIM Bajas World Cup. MX Ride Dubai has entered four motorcycles in Qatar and the team's lead rider Mohamed al-Balooshi will be hoping to repeat his recent Saudi victory and extend his early lead in the FIM Bajas World Cup. The Emirati has mixed memories of his previous visits to Qatar for the longer Cross-Country Rally and knows full well how tricky the navigation is and how deceptive the terrain can be.

His brother Sultan is 10th in the championship standings and rides a second team bike alongside fellow Emirati Marwan al-Rahmani and Kuwait's Abdullah al-Shatti. Jordan's Abdullah Abu Aishah is not present on this occasion.



Talented Polish rider Konrad Dabrowski claimed overall victory in last year's Qatar International Baja.

Qatar-based Australian Martin Chalmers is seeded at two after finishing second to al-Balooshi in Saudi Arabia, while Briton Alex McInnes is third in the points' standings after round one and starts at three.

Talented Polish rider Konrad Dabrowski claimed overall victory in last year's Qatar International Baja and this year's fourth seed is also the pre-event favourite to win the FIM Juniors' class for riders under 25-years-old on January 1st, 2023. He comes into the week-

end as both the defending FIM Bajas World Cup and Junior Champion.

Konrad's closest Junior rival may well be McInnes, who leads the Junior section on his Motozone Husqvarna after finishing second in the championship last season. Canadian Jonathan Finn and Italy's Alessandro Iacovelli will also be chasing points in Juniors.

The experienced KTM rider Mirjam Pol is the defending FIM Women's World Champion and leads three rivals into a tussle for honours in Qatar. The



Briton Alex McInnes is third in the points' standings after round one.

Dutch girl lines up against last year's runner-up, Poland's Joanna Modrzevska, Kuwait's Sarah Khuraibet and Great Britain's Vanessa Ruck, the latter riding a Honda CRF 450 RX.

Fourteen riders are eligible to score points in the FIM Veterans category for over 45s. Australia's Andrew Houlihan leads the class after his useful ninth-place finish in Saudi Arabia but competition will be intense in the Qatar deserts.

The Husqvarna rider faces a six-

strong Italian challenge from Cesare Zacchetti, Francesco Catanese, Fabrizio Macchitella, Alberto Bertoldi, Elio Aglioni and Enrico Tanganelli, while Britain's Barry Howe also holds European hopes of success alongside Norway's Ola Floene.

The Qatari trio of Sheikh Mohamed al-Thani, Mahanna Rashid al-Naimi and Mohamed al-Kaabi, South Africa's Jaco Anderson and Emirati rider Mohamed al-Shamsi round off the runners eligible for the Veterans' category.

The competitive action gets underway with a Prologue stage on Thursday from 14.15hrs onwards.

This precedes the ceremonial start at a new location on Lusail Boulevard, starting with the motorcycles and quads from 19.30hrs.

2023 QATAR INTERNATIONAL BAJA - LEADING ENTRIES

FIM - Bikes (top 10): 1. Mohamed al-Balooshi (ARE) KTM 450 Rally Replica; 2. Martin Chalmers (AUS) Beta 430 RR; 3. Alex McInnes (GBR) Husqvarna FE450; 4. Konrad Dabrowski (POL) KTM 450 Rally; 5. Jonathan Finn (CAN) Honda CRF 450 RL; 6. Mishal al-Ghuneim (SAU) KTM 450 Rally; 7. Hamdan al-Ali (ARE) KTM 450; 8. Brett Hunt (GBR) Husqvarna FE450; 9. Andrew Houlihan (AUS) Husqvarna FR; 10. Sultan al-Balooshi (ARE) TBA

FIM - Juniors: 3. Alex McInnes (GBR) Husqvarna FE450; 4. Konrad Dabrowski (POL) KTM 450 Rally; 5. Jonathan Finn (CAN) Honda CRF 450 RL; 49. Alessandro Iacovelli (ITA) Husaberg 350 FE

FIM - Women: 28. Mirjam Pol (NLD) KTM; 30. Joanna Modrzevska (POL) KTM 450 Rally; 31. Sarah Khuraibet (KWT) Husqvarna FE 450; 41. Vanessa Ruck (GBR) Honda CRF 450 RX

FIRST TEST

Williamson leads New Zealand to last-ball win

Former captain ran a bye off the final delivery of the Test match in a remarkable conclusion

AFP
Christchurch, New Zealand

Kane Williamson was hailed as “world class” after New Zealand’s record Test run-scorer orchestrated a dramatic last-ball win over Sri Lanka on a rain-disrupted final day in Christchurch yesterday. The thrilling triumph at the Hagley Oval scuppered Sri Lanka’s chances of making the World Test Championship final, handing the spot to India.

In a helter-skelter finish, the only Sri Lankans not guarding the boundary for most of the closing 10 overs were the bowler and wicketkeeper as New Zealand chased down their target of 285. Having lost eight wickets and on a day limited to 53 overs, skipper Tim Southee paid tribute to his star batsman Williamson.

The former captain finished 121 not out and ran a bye off the final delivery of the match in a remarkable conclusion, to go with New Zealand’s one-run victory over England a fortnight ago. “Seeing how calm he is out in the middle keeps us calm as well,” Southee said as New Zealand celebrated another famous, nail-biting win.

“The guys were very trusting in what he was going to do and alongside Daryl (Mitchell) for most of the day it was a great partnership that got us in that great position. He’s a world-class player and world-class players are able to perform in different conditions.”

Visiting captain Dimuth Karunaratne said that fielding errors let his side down, particularly dropping the talisman Williamson on 33. “We had a good chance to win, unfortunately we are the losing side,” he said. “We had misfields a few times that cost us the game. We have to minimise those mistakes.”

When rain wiped out the first two sessions on the fifth day, the umpires ruled there would be a minimum of 53 overs played in the evening, which meant New Zealand would have to average 4.85 an over.

After a steady but slow start which



New Zealand’s Kane Williamson (left) completes a successful run to win the first Test against Sri Lanka in Christchurch. (AFP)

saw the hosts at 90-3, Williamson and Mitchell picked up the pace.

They put on 142 in 26 overs for the fourth wicket with the precision of a one-day partnership as Sri Lanka paid a heavy price for Niroshan Dickwella dropping Williamson. “If we had grabbed that catch it would have been a different story,” said skipper Karunaratne.

The 31-year-old Mitchell, a late arrival on the international stage, contributed 81 to lift his average to a phenomenal 59.04 from 26 innings. In a match of see-sawing fortunes, Sri Lanka had the upper hand on the opening two days before a first-innings century from Mitchell and a swashbuckling

72 from Matt Henry – the last 60 from only 35 deliveries – swung the game in New Zealand’s favour.

Sri Lanka fought their way back into contention on the fourth day with a defiant 115 from Angelo Mathews, who built partnerships of 105 for the fifth wicket with Dinesh Chandimal and then 60 with Dhananjaya de Silva. When the Sri Lanka second innings folded at 302 it left New Zealand needing 285 to win on a ground where the highest fourth-innings score was 256-8 by New Zealand in a 2018 draw against England.

Devon Conway was removed for five, leaving the outcome on a knife edge going into the final day. When play resumed on Monday, Prabath Jayasuriya

made early in-roads with the wickets of Tom Latham for 25 and Henry Nicholls for 20.

Asitha Fernando bowled Mitchell and Tom Blundell (three) and had Michael Bracewell caught for 10 to leave New Zealand 266-6 and needing a further 19 runs with 16 balls left. Williamson kept going to take the game to the final ball as Southee (one) and Matt Henry (four) came and went, with Neil Wagner not out nought. For Sri Lanka, Fernando took 3-63 and Jayasuriya 2-92. The second Test starts in Wellington on Friday.

SCOREBOARD	
Sri Lanka I innings	355
New Zealand I innings	373



Kane Williamson remained unbeaten on 121, for his 27th Test ton. (AFP)

Sri Lanka II innings 302	
New Zealand II innings (overnight 28-1)	
T. Latham b Jayasuriya	24
D. Conway c & b Rajitha	5
K. Williamson not out	121
H. Nicholls c Mendis b Jayasuriya	20
D. Mitchell b A. Fernando	81
T. Blundell b A. Fernando	3
M. Bracewell c sub b A. Fernando	10
T. Southee c de Silva b Kumara	1
M. Henry run out (Rajitha/Fernando)	4
N. Wagner not out	0
Extras (b5, lb4, nb1, w6)	16
Total (eight wickets; 70 overs) 285	
Fall of wickets: 1-9 (Conway), 2-50 (Latham), 3-90 (Nicholls), 4-232 (Mitchell), 5-238 (Blundell), 6-266 (Bracewell), 7-273 (Southee), 8-280 (Henry)	
Did not bat: B. Tickner	
Bowling: Rajitha 17-5-60-1 (1w), A. Fernando 19-4-63-3 (1w), Jayasuriya 19-1-92-2 (4w, 1nb), Kumara 15-3-61-1	
Result: New Zealand won by two wickets	

England bring in Australian coach Saker for home Ashes

London: David Saker is set to reprise his role as England’s fast bowling coach for this year’s Ashes after the Australian was approached by skipper Ben Stokes at the Twenty20 World Cup last year. Saker was the coach when England won the Ashes 3-1 in Australia in 2010-11 but switched to his home country for the 2017-18 series as they won 4-0.



He was a consultant on England’s coaching staff when they won the T20 World Cup. “I don’t think I’ll do much Test cricket, but I’m doing the Ashes. Ben (Stokes) said: ‘I’d like to get you involved in the Ashes,’” Saker was quoted as saying by British media.

“Rob Key (England cricket’s managing director) had already floated it a little bit, but being so busy I wasn’t sure if I really wanted to do it. Once Stokesy pushed it, it made it an easy decision. I said yes straight away because of the magnitude of the occasion. I’ve been involved in Ashes with both parties and the cricket is as exciting as it gets. It’s the biggest test event.”

Saker said there was no question of switching loyalties as he looked at it “like any job”.

The 56-year-old said he was looking forward to working with not only veteran pacers James Anderson and Stuart Broad but also Jofra Archer and Mark Wood. “The outliers are obviously the 150kmph bowlers. It’s exciting if we can have Jofra and Wood available. Whether you play them together is another thing, but I think you need that pace against the Australians,” he said.

“Playing in English conditions I think it puts their bowling group in front of the Australians, without a doubt. It’ll come down to whatever team can bat the best really, I think both sides know that.”

The Ashes begin on June 16 with the first Test at Edgbaston

SPOTLIGHT

India clinch series, reach WTC final



Indian players celebrate after winning the Border-Gavaskar series at the end of the fourth Test against Australia in Ahmedabad yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Ahmedabad

India won their fourth series in a row against Australia after a fourth and final Test lit up by an epic 186 by Virat Kohli ended in a draw yesterday in Ahmedabad. The hosts won the series 2-1 and the world’s two top-ranked teams will do battle again on June 7-11 at The Oval in the World Test Championship final.

Even before the players shook hands on day five, India knew they had reached the WTC decider thanks to New Zealand’s thrilling last-ball win over Sri Lanka earlier in the day. It will be India’s second successive WTC final, having lost the inaugural edition to New Zealand in 2021.

Australia reached 175-2 in their second innings in the final session of play at the world’s biggest cricket stadium when the players of both teams called it a day. “We do understand the importance of this series and the opposition. Lot of hard work has gone into this,” India skipper Rohit Sharma said.

Coach Rahul Dravid said: “It was a really hard-fought series, there were moments where we were put under extreme pressure by a really good cricket team and we responded.”

India similarly lifted the Border-Gavaskar Trophy at home in 2017 and then beat the Australians in their own back yard in 2018-19 and 2020-21, each time 2-1. Travis Head (90) and Marcus Labuschagne (63 not out) snuffed out India’s push for a victory on the final day with a stand of 139 after nightwatchman Matthew Kuhnemann fell early for six.

The left-handed Head, capping a successful series after being left out of the first Test, missed out on his century after being bowled by Axar Patel. Regular opener Usman Khawaja did not to bat due to “lower leg soreness” after getting hurt while fielding on day four.

The match in Ahmedabad belonged though to Kohli, who hit a masterful knock on day four to end a Test century drought of 1,205 days since his previous ton. The marathon 364-ball knock blocked every chance of a potential defeat for the hosts after Australia posted 480 on a vastly different pitch from the previous three Tests.

Kohli, one of the best players of his generation, recorded his 28th Test century to power India to 571 all out on Sunday as India managed a lead of 91 after their first innings. “I think in Test cricket I wasn’t able to play with my tempo and template that I have played with for the

last 10 years for a while now,” said the man-of-the-match. Kohli’s partnership of 162 for the sixth wicket with Axar, who hit his third half-century of the series with an attacking 79, marked India’s dominance on Sunday. Opener Shubman Gill hit 128 to lead India’s reply and make the most of his opportunity after being added to the team in place of struggling KL Rahul in the third Test.

Indian spinner Ravichandran Ashwin excelled with his six wickets in Australia’s first innings, in a run-filled match which was at odds with the first three Tests. Ashwin managed 25 wickets in the series, ahead of Ravindra Jadeja’s 22, as the spin duo received the player-of-the-series award jointly.

Not to be outdone, Australian spinner Nathan Lyon took 22 wickets including three in the final Test and was ably supported by up-and-coming spinners Todd Murphy and Kuhnemann. “The spinners bowled really well,” said stand-in-skipper Steve Smith. “Murphy and Kuhnemann bowled with composure. Lyon bowled his best in the first innings here, the best I have seen him bowl.”

An Australia team which lost several players to injury and personal circumstances had appeared on the brink of chaos after being well beaten inside three

days in the first two Tests. But the tourists roared back to win the third match in Indore in just over two days on a viciously turning track to keep the series alive until the final match.

Smith led Australia in the final two Tests after regular captain Pat Cummins returned home to be with his seriously ill mother. She died last week. The two teams now head into three one-day internationals starting Friday in Mumbai, ahead of the 50-over World Cup in India later this year.

SCOREBOARD	
Australia I innings	480 all out
India I innings	571 all out
Australia II innings (overnight 3-0; Head 3, Kuhnemann 0)	
M. Kuhnemann lbw b Ashwin	6
T. Head b Axar	90
M. Labuschagne not out	63
S. Smith not out	10
Extras (b4, lb1, nb1)	6
Total (2 wickets dec, 78.1 overs) 175	
Did not bat: U. Khawaja, P. Handscomb, C. Green, A. Carey, M. Starc, N. Lyon, T. Murphy	
Bowling: Ashwin 24-9-58-1, Jadeja 20-7-34-0 (nb1), Shami 8-119-0, Axar 19-8-36-1, Yadav 5-0-21-0, Gill 11-0-1-0, Pujara 1-0-1-0	
Series: India clinch four-match series 2-1	

FOCUS

Delhi Test sealed series fate, agree rival captains

Reuters
Ahmedabad

India captain Rohit Sharma and his Australia counterpart Steve Smith agreed the fate of the four-Test series for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy was sealed in Delhi where the resilient hosts bounced triumphed by six wickets inside three days.

India comprehensively won the series opener in Nagpur but were under pressure in the low-scoring contest in Delhi where Australia posted 263 and reduced the hosts to 139-7. Axar Patel led a spectacular rearguard action to help India post 262 and Australia imploded in their second innings when they were shot out for 113 with Ravindra Jadeja leading their rout with 7-42.

“We knew how important it was to start the series well but the Delhi Test match is something I’m really proud of,” Rohit said after India won the four-Test series 2-1 as the final match ended in a draw in Ahmedabad. “We were very much behind the

game and to come back from the situation that we did shows a lot of character and the fight that the boys have in them.”

While India retained the trophy with back-to-back wins in Nagpur and Delhi, Australia found themselves buffeted by a series of injuries. Australia bounced back in Indore where they beat India inside three days but had to settle for a draw on a flat batting track in Ahmedabad where only 22 wickets fell in five days.

Smith felt the outcome of the series could have been different had they grabbed their opportunity in Delhi. “That hour of madness, I suppose, in Delhi really cost us in that game,” Smith said at the presentation ceremony. “But I think coming back from that in the next game in Indore, we fought back really nicely, and in this game as well we put it all together. Unfortunately the wicket was probably a little bit too flat for a result in the end, but it was good cricket all the same.”

The teams will now clash in a three-match one-day series beginning in Mumbai on Friday.

Shadab to lead new-look Pakistan against Afghanistan with seniors rested

Lahore: All-rounder Shadab Khan has been named Pakistan captain for the Twenty20 series against Afghanistan in the absence of regular skipper Babar Azam who has been rested along with several other senior players, the Pakistan Cricket Board said yesterday. Fakhar Zaman, Haris Rauf, Mohamed Rizwan and Shaheen Shah Afridi have also been rested as the PCB looks to manage their workloads with one eye on the T20 World Cup next year. Babar and Rizwan have been an integral part of the team, while Zaman, Rauf and Afridi

have battled injuries. Ihsanullah, Saim Ayub, Tayyab Tahir and Zaman Khan are some of the uncapped players included in the squad. Pakistan, who were runners-up at the T20 World Cup last year, will play Afghanistan in three matches in Sharjah between March 24-27. **PAKISTAN SQUAD:** Shadab Khan (captain), Abdullah Shafique, Azam Khan, Faheem Ashraf, Iftikhar Ahmed, Ihsanullah, Imad Wasim, Mohamed Haris, Mohamed Nawaz, Mohamed Wasim Jr, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Shan Masood, Tayyab Tahir, Zaman Khan.

ATHLETICS

High jump legend Fosbury dies at 76

1968 Olympics gold medallist passed away early on Sunday, from lymphoma

AFP
Los Angeles

Athletics legend Dick Fosbury, who revolutionised high jumping with his signature “Fosbury flop” has died, his agent confirmed yesterday. He was 76.

Fosbury’s agent Ray Schulte said in a statement that the 1968 Olympics gold medallist had died peacefully in his sleep early Sunday from lymphoma. “Dick will be greatly missed by friends and fans from around the world. A true legend, and friend of all!”

Born in Portland, Oregon, in 1947, Fosbury was to become one of the most influential athletes in the history of track and field for developing the innovative high-jumping technique which upended his sport in the 1960s. Prior to Fosbury’s emergence, high jumpers typically attempted to clear the bar using the “straddle technique” in which they would take off face forward while attempting to twist their body mid-leap over the bar.

Fosbury, however, turned the conventional wisdom on its head with his new approach which would become immortalised as the “Fosbury Flop” and remains today the standard technique used by elite high jumpers. Instead of tackling the bar head on, the rangy, 6ft 4in Fosbury would arc towards the bar on his run-up before taking off backwards and “flopping” over the bar.

“Few athletes in history have done their thing as uniquely as Dick Fosbury,” former US high jump coach John Tansley wrote in 1980. “He literally turned his event upside down.”

Fosbury first began experimenting with new ways of high jumping while still in school, hitting upon his new technique in 1963 during a competition in which he jumped a personal best of 1.65m using an old technique. “Then they raised the bar and I knew I had to try something different to get over it,” Fosbury said in 2011. “I knew I had to lift my hips up and to do that I needed to get my shoulders back out of the way. And I cleared the bar at the next height, eventually jumping 1.77m so I improved by 15cm that day.”



In this file photograph taken on October 20, 1968, US athlete Dick Fosbury competes in the men’s high jump final and wins the gold medal with a brand new style of jumping at the Mexico Olympic Games in Mexico City. (AFP)



It was not until 1968 however that Fosbury’s new approach gained global attention. Victory at the US college

championships was followed by a win at the US Olympic trials in Los Angeles. At the Mexico City Olympics, Fosbury won the gold medal after clearing a height of 2.24m with his third jump – a new Olympic and US record – to pip team-mate Ed Caruthers, with the Soviet Union’s Valentin Gavrilov taking bronze.

Fosbury’s performances at the Olympics electrified the stadium, with Mexican fans delighted by the gangly American college student’s bold approach. “No track and field athlete at the Olympic Games drew more whoops of delight or shrieks of disbelief from the crowds ... than did Dick Fosbury, the architect of an acrobatic manoeuvre that has become known as the Fosbury Flop,” the New York Times commented at the time.

Fosbury would say later that he never saw himself as a revolutionary, and did

not anticipate that his style would become the standard technique for high jumping. “I have had the blessing and good fortune to have made a contribution to the sport but I did not set out to do this,” he told Athletics Weekly. “I was not trying to change the event. I knew that my technique was my path to success. And I had this technique which was mine – mine alone.”

Fosbury was the only competitor using the “Fosbury Flop” in the 1968 Olympics. By the time of the 1972 Munich Games, 28 of 40 competitors in the discipline had adopted his style.

“I thought that after I won the gold, one or two jumpers would start using it, but I never really contemplated that it would become the universal technique,” Fosbury said in 2012. “Yet, it only took a generation.”

SPOTLIGHT

500 days before the Paris Olympics, the race is on

AFP
Paris

In 500 days today, the 2024 Summer Olympics will burst into life in Paris as the teams float down the River Seine on barges in a unique opening ceremony. The Paris Olympics and Paralympics have a lot riding on them – they involve the return of full crowds of spectators to the world’s greatest sporting spectacle after the Covid-blighted Summer Games in Tokyo in 2021 and the Winter Olympics in Beijing last year.

On top of that, the spending on the Games is being scrutinised as never before – venues are focused on Seine-Saint-Denis, the poorest area in France. And the buildup is being buffeted by the war in Ukraine and its ramifications for competitors from that country, Russia and its ally Belarus. Here are the key issues to be resolved before the Games open on July 26, 2024:

WILL BANNED RUSSIANS TAKE PART?

The International Olympic Committee’s suggestion that it wants to find a “pathway” for athletes from Russia and its ally Belarus to take part as neutrals in Paris moved a stop closer on Friday when the International Fencing Federation said it would re-open its events to Russians.

Ukraine has reacted with fury to the prospect that its athletes will have to compete alongside their aggressors while their country is being bombed from the air and shelled by Russian tanks and has threatened to boycott the Games.

IOC president Thomas Bach has passed the decision on to the federations of individual sports, such as fencing.

Thirty countries including the United States have asked the IOC for “clarification” over how Russian athletes would be able to compete in practice.

CEREMONY PLANS CAUSE CONCERNS

The plans to take the opening ceremony out of its traditional stadium setting and stage it on the River Seine, framed by the Eiffel Tower and other monuments, is an organisational headache and has provoked concerns from the security services.

The original plan allows for up to 600,000 spectators along the banks of the Seine but political sources say the number could be revised down.

Private security companies are struggling to recruit enough staff, begging the question of whether the army will be called in, as it was for the 2012 London Olympics. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin says it is “too early to say” while Etienne Thobois, the director general of the 2024 organising committee says “all scenarios are on the table”.

TRANSPORT HEADACHE

Will the Paris transport system, which has been plagued by staff shortages and sporadic strikes in recent months, be ready to move millions of people around the city for the Olympics? Now headed by former prime minister Jean Castex, network operator RATP is under extreme pressure.

There are serious questions about whether the extension of a key metro line to the Athletes’ Village will be completed and a large shortfall in the number of bus drivers is causing concerns too. Paris’ airports, still attempting to return to full capacity after the Covid pandemic, are in a race against time to be ready for a massive influx of competitors and spectators from abroad.

TICKET POLICY CRITICISM

The first sales phase for tickets sparked criticism from people who felt they were too expensive and resented being forced to buy tickets for minor sports if they also wanted to see popular events like athletics and gymnastics. The organisers say the prices are in line with the London Olympics.

Chief organiser Tony Estanguet insisted the first stage had been a success “even if we understand the criticism and the frustration of some people who were not satisfied”.

BUDGET SCRUTINY

The organising committee’s budget, of which 96 percent comes from private funding, rose 10 percent to 4.4bn euros (\$4.7bn) last year. Add to that another 4.4 billion euros for Solideo, the body tasked with building facilities, and the total budget comes to 8.8bn euros.

Local politicians in the deprived Seine-Saint-Denis area are watching the expenditure more closely than anyone. “When the Olympic flame is extinguished, residents here won’t be asking (Paris Mayor) Anne Hidalgo, (President) Emmanuel Macron or Tony Estanguet for accountability, they’ll be asking me,” said the head of the area, Stephane Troussel.



Olympic rings are on display in front of The City Hall in Paris yesterday, ahead of the 2024 Olympic Games. (AFP)

QUALIFIER GARIN STUNS RUUD, NORRIE AND ZVEREV SURVIVE

Indian Wells, United States: Chilean qualifier Cristian Garin shocked third-seeded Casper Ruud 6-4, 7-6 (7/2) to reach the fourth round at Indian Wells on Sunday as in-form Briton Cameron Norrie survived a scare. Garin’s attacking game paid off as he dispatched world number four Ruud in just under two hours.

Tenth-seeded Norrie, who reached the final in Buenos Aires and lifted the trophy in Rio de Janeiro last month, was down a set and 4-1 to Japanese qualifier Taro Daniel before rallying for a 6-7 (5/7), 7-5, 6-2 victory.

Garin, ranked 97th in the world, earned his first hard court victory over a top-10 player and continued his impressive form in the California desert, where he hasn’t dropped a set in qualifying or main draw matches at the ATP and WTA combined event. “The way I played today I’m so happy,” the 26-year-old said. “I was aggressive the whole match.”

His 39 winners were too much for Ruud, a two-time Grand Slam finalist last

year who had hoped a quick victory over Diego Schwartzman in his second-round opener would mark a turnaround in a season where he hadn’t advanced past the second round in three prior tournaments.

He broke Garin’s serve just once, to level the second set at 3-3, but the Chilean turned up the heat again in the tiebreaker and earned a meeting with Spain’s Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, a 6-3, 1-6, 6-4 winner over Karen Khachanov. Norrie, the 2021 Indian Wells champion, looked like he, too, might be headed for an unexpected exit after 103rd-ranked Daniel squeezed out the first-set tiebreaker and grabbed an early break on the way to a 4-1 lead in the second.

Daniel, with metronomic consistency from the baseline, looked poised to pull off a repeat of his 2018 Indian Wells victory over Norrie, when they met in the first round. But Norrie was able to make the necessary adjustments and

dominated in the third.

Former world number two Alexander Zverev, seeded 12th as he works his way back from the torn ankle ligaments that ended his 2022 campaign at the French Open, said he was fortunate to come out on top in a 7-5, 1-6, 7-5 victory over Finland’s Emil Ruusuvuori.

“Starting the second set and to be honest throughout the third set I felt like he was the much better player and I just kind of was hanging onto the match,” the German said. “I was just trying my best and I’m happy that I found a way because it was all about that today.”

After recovering an early break in the third set, Ruusuvuori had four chances to break Zverev in the ninth game but couldn’t convert. Serving to force a tiebreaker, he led 30-15 but three straight errors from the baseline handed Zverev the match. “To be honest I think he played much better than me throughout the match,” Zverev said. “It’s just the way it is sometimes. This is tennis, one or two

points can decide a match and I’m happy that I won those points.”

Zverev next faces either red-hot Russian Daniil Medvedev, who is coming off three ATP titles in as many weeks, or Ilya Ivashka. Their clash headlined a night session that also featured Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus taking on Ukrainian qualifier Lesia Tsurenko.

In other early matches, third-seeded American Jessica Pegula again rallied from a set down, beating Anastasia Potapova 3-6, 6-4, 7-5. Last year’s runner-up, Maria Sakkari, shook off a slow start to beat Ukraine’s Anhelina Kalinina 3-6, 6-2, 6-4.

Sakkari, the seventh seed, needed two and a half hours to seal her second straight come-from-behind victory.

She was down a break in both the second and third sets, but held on and will face either Veronika Kudermetova or Karolina Pliskova for a place in the quarter-finals.

FOCUS

Misbah powers Asia Lions to victory

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Misbah Ul Haq cracked an unbeaten 44 off just 19 balls as Asia Lions beat World Giants by 35 runs in a rain-reduced match at Legends League Cricket yesterday. Tillakaratne Dilshan also made an unbeaten 32 off 24 balls as Asian Lions posted 99 for 3 in 10 overs at Asian Town International Stadium.

The match was reduced to 10-over a side after persistent light rain. World Giants could muster only 64 for 5 in 10 overs despite Chris Gayle’s 23 off 16 balls with three sixes. Asian Lions skipper Shahid Afridi, with a double strike in the fifth over by removing Gayle and Lendl Simmons, put his team on the road to victory. Bangladesh’s left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak removed Shane Watson and Ricardo Powell in eighth over as World Giants fell short by 35 runs

It was second win for the Asian Li-



Misbah Ul Haq hit an unbeaten 44 off just 19 balls at Asian Town Stadium.

ons after their win over India Mahara-jas in the tournament opener.

BRIEF SCORES

Asia Lions 99 for 3 in 10 overs (Tillaka-

ratne Dilshan 32 n.o, Misbah Ul Haq 44 n.o) beat World Giants 64 for 5 in 10 overs (Chris Gayle 23, Shahid Afridi 2 for 11, Abdur Razzak 2 for 2)

Player of the Match: Misbah Ul Haq

GOLF

Scheffler back to No. 1 after Players win

AFP
Miami

American **Scottie Scheffler** won The Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass by five strokes on Sunday to return to number one in the world rankings. Scheffler ran away with the US PGA Tour showdown at Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, after making five straight birdies between the eighth and 12th holes while his closest rival, Australian Min Woo Lee imploded.

The defending Masters champion, who ended on 17-under par 271, will replace Spain’s Jon Rahm atop the rankings on Monday. Rahm withdrew from the event due to illness. The 26-year-old from New Jersey won four events on the tour last year, including at Augusta, and now has two more already this season, having won in Phoenix last month. “I’m just trying to get a little bit better at a time, not over-think things, and fortunately to be able to see some good results and



enjoy some wins and I’m very thankful,” he said.

Scheffler began the day with a two-stroke lead over Lee, who immediately reduced the deficit with a birdie on the opening hole. When Scheffler bogeyed the third, the pair were in a tie for the lead but it was soon to change dramatically when Lee had a nightmare on the par-4 fourth hole, where he made a triple bogey.

Lee found the rough off the tee and took his medicine, chipping out back on to the fairway but that cautious

decision was followed by his approach shot ending in the water. A double bogey on the 11th, where he got in trouble in the trees, saw Lee fall totally out of contention and by then Scheffler was in his groove and moving away from the field. After his streak of birdies, which got under way when he chipped in to birdie the par-three eighth, it was a victory procession for Scheffler over the final holes. He crowned his victory in style with a superb 21-foot putt on the 18th. Scheffler becomes only the third player to hold the Masters and Players titles at the same time after Jack Nicklaus and Tiger Woods and said the bigger events raise his game.

England’s Tyrrell Hatton finished second after a sensational close with five straight birdies to complete the back nine in 29, the lowest score on the back section in a final round. Hatton ended on 12-under par after his 65 with Norway’s Viktor Hovland and American Tom Hoge tied for third, a further two strokes back. Japan’s Hideki Matsuyama shot a four-under 68 to finish fifth, 9-under for the week.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Inzaghi under pressure as Inter face Porto

AFP
Milan

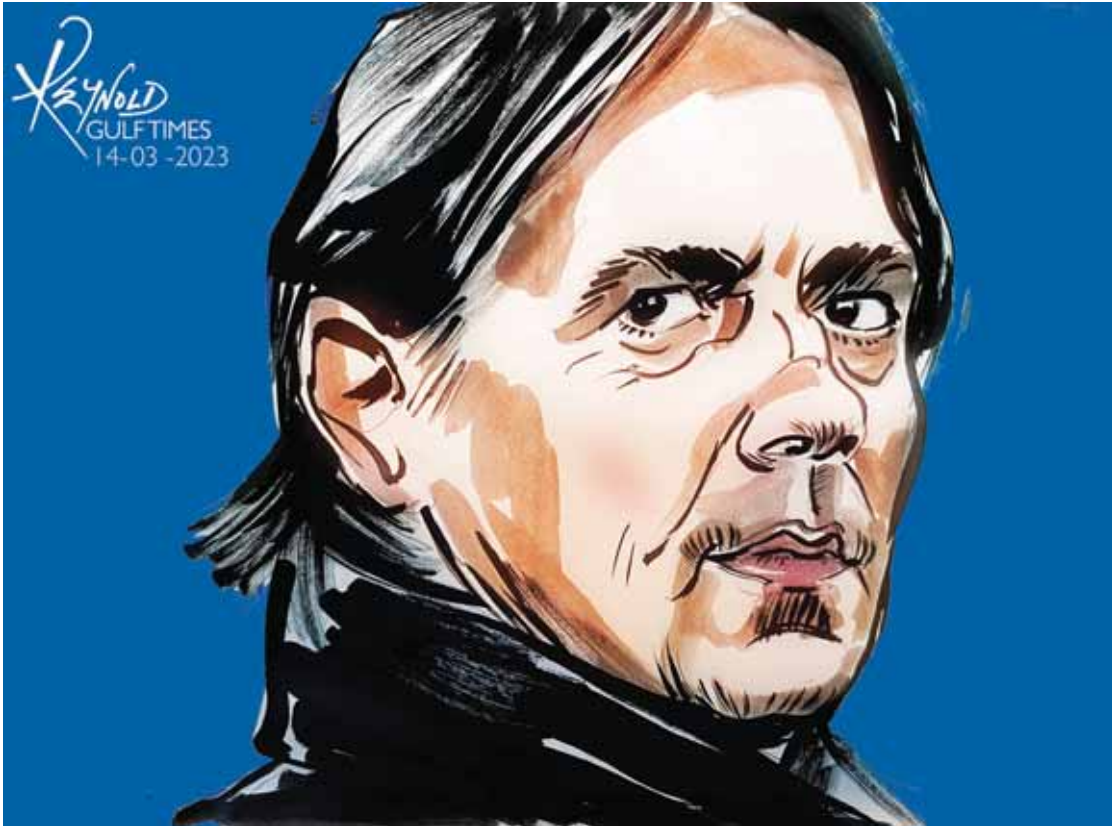
Simone Inzaghi is in the firing line as his Inter Milan side travel to Porto trying to make the last eight of the Champions League and turn a depressing tide of bad results away from home. Friday's 2-1 defeat at relegation-threatened Spezia was the latest poor effort away from the San Siro and left Inter once again 18 points behind champions-elect Napoli.

Inzaghi and his team were booed and insulted by the Inter fans present at the Stadio Picco, who had to watch the son of AC Milan icon Paolo Maldini slot home the opening goal. Inter have only held on to second place in Italy's top flight thanks to Lazio failing to win at Bologna on Saturday, but their bid to qualify for next season's Champions League is being damaged by their dreadful away form. Inzaghi said "we won't be able to sleep" after Friday's hugely disappointing eighth loss of the Serie A season, which took their tally of goals conceded to 24 in 13 league away matches.

"We're not happy about our results away from the San Siro. Last year it was a different story," said Inzaghi. "We have had some great results away, like at Barcelona (a 3-3 draw), and we know that we need to put in a great performance if we're going to reach the quarter-finals."

Inter's defensive wobbles were also present in their group stage campaign, with five goals conceded in matches at Barcelona and Bayern Munich. And elimination today would not only mean missing out on a first last-eight tie since 2011, it would also heap more pressure on Inzaghi with fierce rivals Juventus visiting the San Siro on Sunday.

One piece of good news is that Milan Skriniar might be ready to return from a spell on the sidelines with lower back pain. Porto, gunning for a third quarter-final in five seasons, have been a bogey side to Italian teams in recent years and are aiming to add to the series of Serie A scalps which include Juventus and Roma.



The Portuguese champions had to come from behind when they knocked out Roma four seasons ago and have cause for optimism given how they performed in Milan last month.

Marko Grujic, Mehdi Taremi and Zaidu Sanusi all had great opportunities to score before Romelu Lukaku

netted the only goal of the game shortly before the end. However Sergio Conceicao again has to deal with important absences. Gabriel Veron is out with an ankle injury and Evanilson and Galeno are both suffering from muscle problems. In addition, Otavio will be suspended and unable to play in the game.

FOOTBALL

Man City reign will be defined by Champions League: Guardiola

Midfielder De Bruyne says the Guardiola era should still be deemed a success

AFP
London

Pep Guardiola admits his Manchester City reign will be defined by success in the Champions League no matter how many times his side win the Premier League. City face Bundesliga high-flyers Leipzig in the second leg of their Champions League last-16 tie today looking to advance to the quarter-finals for a sixth successive season.

Guardiola's men were held to a 1-1 draw in the first leg, but are fancied to progress in front of their own fans at the Etihad Stadium. For Guardiola, the quest to end City's wait to win Europe's elite club competition for the first time is both a source of frustration and inspiration.

The 52-year-old has lifted the Premier League four times, while also winning four League Cups and one FA Cup during his remarkably successful seven years in Manchester. Yet for all his domestic glory with City, it is the Champions League that remains the holy grail. Guardiola won the Champions League twice as Barcelona boss, in 2009 and 2011, but failed to repeat that success in his three years with Bayern Munich. City lost to Chelsea in the 2021 final but have also endured a series of agonising exits from the knock-out stages, with last season's astonishing late collapse against Real Madrid in the semi-finals an especially bitter blow.

Asked if his time at City would be judged solely on his European achievements, Guardiola told reporters: "Yes. It doesn't mean I agree with that but absolutely we



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola. (Reuters)

will be judged by this competition."

However, he believes City's gradual progress from outsiders to established

members of Europe's elite under his leadership deserves more respect. "Since day one when I arrived, sitting here for the

first time, they (the media) asked me 'Are you here to win the Champions League?'" he said. "I said 'What? If you are manager of Real Madrid maybe I accept that? But I accept it here. It's not going to change.'"

City midfielder Kevin De Bruyne is adamant the Guardiola era should still be deemed a success despite the failure so far to land the Champions League title. "Every year we have been close, quarters, semis, final. We just haven't done the last bit. We are going to try again," he said. "If you care about the noise then obviously it's going to annoy you. I know we haven't won it but we have done really well. I know people only judge on if you win it, but there have been a lot of circumstances."

With City trailing five points behind leaders Arsenal in the Premier League, the Champions League is even more important for Guardiola's team this season. For City to win the Premier League or Champions League, they will need Erling Haaland at his best.

Haaland scored the penalty winner at Crystal Palace on Saturday to reach 34 goals in all competitions this season. There are still critics of Haaland's lack of involvement in City's build-up play and Guardiola believes the Norway striker can improve that side of his game.

"I don't like one player just to be in the box to score goals. Of course that is important, it is the main thing, but it is not all we need of him," Guardiola said. "When we are away from the opponent's box he cannot score a goal. We need him to be involved and to be active. He has improved a little bit but on this he can do better."

FOCUS

Inaugural Qatar Universities Handball League kicks off

The first edition of the Qatar Universities Handball League 2023 for men kicked off at the Qatar University's New Sport Arena. The event will continue until March 21 with participation of a number of high education institutions and Universities.

The opening ceremony of the event was attended by senior officials and board members of the Qatar Collegiate Sports Federation (QCSF) along with representatives of Universities, participating teams and students. Qatar Universities Handball League is the third consecutive event to be organised within

a month under the umbrella of the Qatar Collegiate Sports Federation (QCSF), according to its sports calendar for the year.

These events are seeing a big turnout and positive response from high education institutions. In a statement, the QCSF Secretary-General, Rashid Saed Mohamed said the QCSF's 2023 calendar is busy with several sport tournaments, saying the activities will help in promoting the sport culture among students. "The QCSF will keep interacting and participating in all the sport and community events annually organised by the State of Qatar," he said.

SPOTLIGHT

BBC reaches deal with Gary Lineker after Twitter row

AFP
London

Gary Lineker will return as presenter of the flagship *BBC* football show *Match of the Day*, the broadcaster said yesterday, ending a crisis sparked by his outspoken criticism of the UK government's new asylum policy. The former England footballer was suspended on Friday after using Twitter last week to compare the language used to launch the new policy to the rhetoric of Nazi-era Germany.

His comments and removal sparked frenzied media coverage which escalated after fellow presenters, pundits and commentators backed Lineker by refusing to work over the weekend. That threw the publicly funded broadcaster's sports coverage into disarray, curtailing its popular highlights package to just 20 minutes, without commentary or analysis. But in a move widely seen as a climbdown by *BBC* chiefs, yesterday the two sides said they had agreed that Lineker would return to screens while the corporation launches an independent review into its social media guidelines. "Gary is a valued part of the *BBC* and I know how much the *BBC* means to Gary, and I look forward to him presenting our coverage this coming weekend," said *BBC* director-general Tim Davie.

In a joint statement, Lineker, 62, said: "I am glad that we have found a way forward. I support this review and look forward to getting back on air." He tweeted separately that the last few days, during which he has been mobbed outside his London home by journalists, had been "surreal".

But in a parting shot he added: "However difficult the last few days have been, it simply doesn't compare to having to flee your home from persecution or war to seek refuge in a land far away."

Davie apologised for the disruption to the service, saying he recognised the "potential confusion caused by the grey areas of the *BBC*'s social media guidance". The review will look at how the guidance applies to staff and freelancers such as Lineker, he added.

Former Leicester, Everton, Tottenham and Barcelona striker Lineker, who has hosted refugees in his home, has often slammed



government policies, particularly on immigration. His comments overshadowed the announcement of plans to toughen laws governing asylum seekers, including the removal of those coming to the UK across the Channel from northern France in small boats.

Critics of Lineker said he should stay out of politics. But he has argued that as a freelancer not working in news, he is not bound by the same social media rules. His supporters point to other potential conflicts of interest in the organisation.

BBC chairman Richard Sharp was a donor to the ruling Conservative party, and facilitated a loan to former prime minister Boris Johnson as he was applying for the high-profile job.

Davie once stood to be a Tory councillor, and the *BBC* board includes others such as Robbie Gibb, who was Downing Street communications director in Theresa May's government. The futures of both Sharp and Davie are being debated after the Lineker fracas.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's spokesman refused to say whether the *BBC* chairman – a political appointee – has Sunak's backing, pointing to another review that is underway into his appointment. "We're pleased that this situation has been resolved and that fans will be able to watch *Match of the Day* as normal this weekend," the spokesman told reporters.

"The *BBC* has a responsibility to maintain impartiality and we welcome any steps to ensure that that responsibility is reflected in their social media guidelines," he added.

Younousse, Tijan win bronze at King of the Court in Miami

Qatar's Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan won the bronze medal at the King of the Court - Miami Beach 2023 Tournament. The Qatari former World No. 1 pair, now ranked third, shared the podium with Estonian duo Kusti Nolvak/ Mart Tiisaar who emerged champions, and the silver winners Noe Aravena/Vicente Droguett of Chile. Canadian duo Brandie Wilkerson and Melissa Humana-Paredes won the women's title.



Wounded Leipzig need 'match of the season' to beat Man City, says manager Rose

London: Leipzig manager Marco Rose says his injury-hit side will need to produce their "match of the season" to knock Manchester City out of the Champions League today. Rose's team will arrive at the Etihad Stadium for the last 16 second leg tie with just 17 available outfield players.

Christopher Nkunku and Xaver Schlager are among the key absentees for the Bundesliga club, who held City to a 1-1 draw in the first leg last month. Leipzig were already underdogs against the Premier League champions even without their injury woes and Rose knows they must be perfect to spring a major upset.

"We played against the opponent a few weeks ago and we know what to expect but it sounds easy in theory. In practice against City it is a different ball game," Rose told. "The first half in Leipzig was bad. Our defence wasn't too bad but we hardly had any possession, that was the main issue."

"We want to be more intensive when we defend, meaning we will have a bit more possession, but once we have the ball we need to be a bit more responsible as well. If we only press it will open spaces for them, but if we just defend and don't attack we will concede at some point. We need to find the right balance, we need a lot of confidence and courage, and we will need our best match this season."

There was one positive piece of fitness news for Rose, with Spain forward Dani Olmo expected to feature after returning from a six-week injury absence for the 3-0 victory over Borussia Monchengladbach at the weekend. "Dani coped pretty well with the injury. He is still recovering but he will definitely be a factor in this game, for 25 or even 30 minutes," Rose said.

"Dani will not be the Dani that we know but he will be of benefit to us, so we are happy that he is coming back."