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PREMIER LEAGUE

Chelsea ruin Mourinho's United return; City held

Victory saw Conte's side move up into fourth place, just a point behind the top three of City, Arsenal and Liverpool

AFP
London

Manchester's two Premier League clubs managed just a point between them yesterday as Manchester United suffered a chastening 4-0 defeat by Chelsea on manager Jose Mourinho's return to Stamford Bridge and leaders Manchester City were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Southampton.

Chelsea's Pedro Rodriguez opened the scoring after just 30 seconds and the Blues were on their way, with Gary Cahill, Eden Hazard and N'Golo Kante adding to the agony for Mourinho, who won seven major titles in two spells as the London club's manager. Victory saw Antonio Conte's side move up into fourth place, just a point behind the top three of City, Arsenal and Liverpool. By contrast, defeat left United seventh and five points adrift of the top four finish they need to qualify for the Champions League after missing out on European club football's elite competition this season — a failure that led the Old Trafford club to replace former manager Louis van Gaal with Mourinho.

"You come with a strategy. You cannot concede a goal in the way we did," Mourinho told *Sky Sports*. "We made incredible defensive mistakes, individual mistakes, and you pay for that."

After the final whistle, Mourinho whispered in the ear of Chelsea manager Antonio Conte.

Conte had urged home fans to make more noise after Kante made it 4-0 in the 70th minute. But Mourinho refused to reveal what he had told the Italian, saying: "My words were with Antonio Conte were for him, not for you."

Conte was equally guarded, telling the *BBC*: "When there is a private conversation it is right to remain private, I have great respect for Jose, he is a great manager and he won a lot here."

As for the match itself Conte, in a separate interview with *Sky Sports*, said: "I am pleased with the performance, we started well, moved the ball quickly, created chances to score the goal."

At Eastlands, City suffered a fifth consecutive match without a victory although the point gained took Pep Guardiola's side back to the top of the table. Following their 4-0 midweek Champions League loss away to Barcelona, City were behind in the 27th minute when central defender John Stones' careless pass across the face of goal was seized on by Saints striker Aaron Redmond. The hosts were much improved in the second half and Kelechi Iheanacho equalised in the 55th minute when he finished a neat move involving Ferdinand and Leroy Sané from close range. "The second half was much better," said Guardiola. "Of course our mistake is always complicated. The way I want to play is not to pass to their striker."

Southampton manager Claude Puel was pleased by the way his side recovered from their 1-0 Europa League loss away to Inter Milan. "We played with just two days recovery after the Inter Milan match, which is difficult and we finished the game tired," said Puel. "It is a good point."



Chelsea's defender Gary Cahill (top) jumps onto the huddle to join the celebration after midfielder N'Golo Kante scored their fourth goal during the English Premier League football match against Manchester United at Stamford Bridge in London yesterday. (AFP)

HOCKEY

India beat Pakistan 3-2 in Asian Champions Trophy

IANIS
Kuantan, Malaysia

India produced a superb comeback to defeat Pakistan 3-2 in their third round robin match at the Asian Champions Trophy hockey tournament here yesterday.

For India, Pardeep Mor (22nd minute), Rupinder Pal Singh (43rd minute) and Ramandeep Singh (44th minute) found the targets while Muhammad Rizwan Senior and Muhammad Irfan Junior scored for Pakistan, respectively in the 31st and 39th minute. With this win, India has seven points from three matches and is in second position in the table. India will now take on China tomorrow. Hosts Malaysia posted their third successive victory when they outplayed Japan 7-2 to stay on top of the round-robin league standings with a maximum nine points. Pakistan and China are on three points from three outings.

Star striker Faizal Saari scored two goals to lead the Malaysian charge, while five others made an entry in the scoresheet. Japan denied the domi-



India are second in the table with seven points from three matches, behind hosts Malaysia.

nant Malaysian strikers a goal until the 23rd minute when Niman Nik Rosemi opened the account with a field goal. Rashid Baharom, Nabil Noor, Firhan

Ashari and Fitri Saari were the other scorers for Malaysia, who had defeated defending champions Pakistan 4-2 and China 5-1 in earlier matches. Japan,

who have lost all their three matches, got two late consolation goals from Kenji Kitazato and Kentaro Fukuda. India did not get the start they want-

ed as in the initial minutes of the game Pakistan broke with a long ball and got their first penalty corner of the match but Indian goalkeeper PR Sreejesh pulled off two back-to-back saves.

The first quarter also saw both teams trying to create openings but it was Pakistan who proved superior throughout the quarter as India failed to find their bearings when Talwinder Singh's shot went past the goalkeeper's gloves and then over the post.

The first quarter came to end with Pakistan dominating. They made at least three good moves and the Indian defence did well not to concede a goal.

In the second quarter, India played with more discipline by not giving away anything in the defence and keeping up the pressure in the midfield.

They penetrated the Pakistani circle many times but success came only in the 22nd minute when a long ball from Rupinder Pal Singh went to SK Utthapa and then Mor slammed a cross into the circle that went through the legs of Pakistan custodian into the goal.

The Pakistan defensive structure of Muhammad Arshad, Niwaz Ashfaq and Muhammad Bilal were alert and con-

fidant, denying the penetration by the blue sticks.

The Roelant Oltmans-coached side went to half time with a 1-0 lead. After the break, a rejuvenated Pakistan started the proceedings much more strongly and found an equaliser in the initial minutes of the third quarter.

Rizwan Sr snapped a shot that left Indian custodian Sreejesh slightly off balance and resulted in the scoreboard count of 1-1. Soon after the equaliser, Pakistan showed more intent in the game as they scored another goal in the 39th minute to take the vital lead. This time a field goal by Irfan Junior did the damage to India.

It seemed like this goal changed everything for India as out of nowhere, India scored two goals within a span of one minute in the dying minutes of the third quarter and created panic among the Pakistani players. The first of these two goals was scored by drag-flicker Rupinder in the 43rd minute via a penalty corner and then in the 44th minute Ramandeep scored a field goal. Lalit Upadhyay passed the ball to Talwinder, whose deft pass was deflected into Pakistan's goal by Ramandeep.

LA LIGA

N'Zonzi downs Atletico to send Sevilla top

Atletico were the form side heading into the weekend after a run of eight wins in nine games

AFP
Madrid

Steven N'Zonzi's winner 17 minutes from time ended Atletico Madrid's unbeaten start to the season and sent Sevilla top of La Liga with a 1-0 win at a soggy Sanchez Pizjuan yesterday.

N'Zonzi made Sevilla's second-half dominance count when he slotted home from on-loan Atletico striker Luciano Vietto's through ball. The visitors ended with 10 men as Koke was shown a second yellow card 13 minutes from time.

Sevilla move a point clear of Barcelona and two ahead of Atletico. However, Real Madrid can move back to the top with victory over Athletic Bilbao late last night. "It is an important win at home against such a strong side like Atletico," N'Zonzi said. Yet, the Frenchman refused to accept Sevilla are now serious title contenders alongside Atletico, Barca and Real Madrid. "It is still very early and it is a long season."

Atletico were the form side in Spain heading into the weekend after a run of eight wins in nine games, but paid for failing to take their chances in the first half as Sevilla extended their perfect league record at home this season.

A hero of Sevilla's three consecutive Europa League triumphs, Kevin Gameiro received a mixed reception on his return to Andalusia, but he should have put Atletico in front when he shot straight at Sergio Rico on 16 minutes.

Angel Correa had an even better opportunity for Diego Simeone's men six minutes before the break when he scampered in behind the Sevilla defence but failed to even hit the target. Sevilla started the second period strongly in unrelenting rain that played its part in an end to end encounter.

The in-form Samir Nasri smashed against the post before Jan Oblak made a remarkable save to prevent Vitolo opening the scoring on the volley from point-blank range.

Vietto endured a woeful debut campaign at Atletico last season after a 20-million-euro (\$21.8 mn) move from Villarreal and was used as a make-weight in the deal that brought Gameiro to Atletico in the summer.

However, he came back to haunt his parent club as he clipped a fine ball over an uncharacteristically static Atletico defence for N'Zonzi to run through and slot coolly past Oblak.

Atletico's already difficult task was made even tougher when Koke dived in rashly four minutes later to receive his marching orders.

Diego Godin could still have rescued a point for



Sevilla's Steven N'Zonzi (centre) reacts after scoring against Atletico Madrid during the Spanish La Liga at Sanchez Pizjuan stadium in Seville. (Reuters)

the Champions League finalists, but his late header was stopped low to his left by Rico as Jorge Sampaoli got one over his Argentine compatriot Simeone to continue his fine start as Sevilla coach.

Earlier, former Liverpool striker Iago Aspas struck twice as Celta Vigo smashed Deportivo la Coruna 4-1 in the Galician derby to move into the top half of the table.

RESULTS

Celta Vigo 4 (Hugo Mallo 32, Aspas 60-pen, 83, Orellana 78) Deportivo la Coruna 1 (Albentosa 37) Sevilla 1 (N'Zonzi 73) Atletico Madrid 0 Malaga 4 (Jony 40-pen, Castro 42, Sandro Ramirez 57, Camacho 90+2) Leganes 0 Villarreal 2 (Sansone 64-pen, Bakambu 90+2) Las Palmas 1 (Boateng 31)

Played Saturday

Espanyol 3 (Perez 64, Piatti 73, Baptistao 90+2) Eibar 3 (Enrich 23, Reyes 27-og, Kike 44) Valencia 2 (El Haddadi 52, Rodrigo 56) Barcelona 3 (Messi 22, 90+4-pen, Luis Suarez 62) Real Sociedad 3 (Xabi Prieto 22, Willian Jose 57, Vela 88) Alaves 0 Granada 0 Sporting Gijon 0

LIGUE 1

Nice shrug off Balotelli injury

AFP
Paris

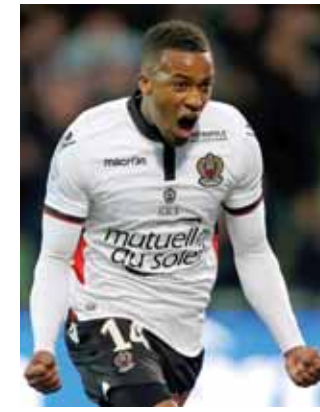
Alassane Plea grabbed a hat-trick as surprise Ligue 1 leaders Nice continued their terrific start to the season with a thrilling 4-2 victory at promoted Metz yesterday.

With Mario Balotelli out injured, Plea assumed the lead role for Lucien Favre's unbeaten side and netted the opener in 12 minutes before adding a second from the penalty spot after Georges Mandjeck had equalised.

Substitute Habib Diallo made it 2-2 midway through the second half for Metz but Plea struck for a third time on 84 minutes before Wylan Cyprien wrapped up the points in injury time.

It was a fifth successive win for Nice as they moved four points clear of second-place Monaco, while Metz have now conceded 14 goals in their last three home matches. Earlier, on-loan duo Henri Saivet and Jordan Veretout scored their first Saint-Etienne goals since returning to France from Newcastle United and Aston Villa respectively in a 2-0 win away to Caen.

Paris Saint-Germain, in third, was to entertain Marseille in the Classique late last night on in what will be Rudi Garcia's first match as coach of the visitors. Monaco provisionally reclaimed second place on Friday with a 6-2 demolition of Montpellier at the Stade Louis II.



Nice's Alassane Plea. (Reuters)

ROUND-UP

Iniesta out for six to eight weeks

AFP
Madrid

Barcelona captain Andres Iniesta will be out for between six and eight weeks, the Spanish champions confirmed on Saturday after he suffered knee ligament damage in a 3-2 win at Valencia.

Iniesta was stretchered from the field in tears after just 14 minutes, but fears he could be sidelined for months were eased by tests upon his return to Barcelona. "After the first diagnosis carried out at Mestalla, the tests in Barcelona have shown the extent of the injury," Barca said in a statement. "The time out is between six and eight weeks."

Iniesta could now return in time to face Real Madrid in the first El Clasico of the season on December 3. However, he will miss Barca's Champions League trips to Manchester City and Celtic next month.

Barca had earlier confirmed Iniesta had injured the lateral collateral ligament in his right knee. Coach Luis Enrique was incensed when Valencia's Argentine midfielder Enzo Perez escaped without even a yellow card for the challenge that caused the injury. "We saw very clearly from the tackle it was an injury, and a serious one," said Enrique.

"We will see tomorrow, but it will be weeks. There wasn't even a yellow card."

Barca's season has been plagued by injuries so far as Lionel Messi has just returned from nearly a month out, whilst Gerard Pique and Jordi Alba were injured in Wednesday's 4-0 win over Manchester City. Messi has returned in fine form, though, as his sixth goal in three games since his comeback deep into stoppage time from the penalty spot moved Barca to the top of La Liga.

STRUGGLING LORIENT PART COMPANY WITH COACH RIPOLL

French Ligue 1 strugglers Lorient yesterday announced the sacking of coach Sylvain Ripoll in the wake of their latest defeat. The announcement came after the Brittany side lost 1-0 away at Dijon on Saturday, their third straight defeat and eighth reverse in 10 matches this season leaving them bottom of the table on goal difference with just six points.



Barcelona's Andres Iniesta lies on a stretcher after being injured during the match against Valencia on Saturday. (AFP)

Former Lorient player Ripoll, 45, had been promoted from his role as assistant to Christian Gourcuff to the position of head coach in 2014.

In his two full seasons at the helm, Lorient finished 16th and then 15th in France's top flight with Ripoll's job made harder by the sales of key players such as Lamine Kone, Raphael Guerreiro, Didier Ndong and Jordan Ayew.

CHELSEA HONOUR LATE VICE-CHAIRMAN HARDING

Chelsea marked the 20th anniversary of the death of club vice-chairman Matthew Harding prior to their Premier League home game win against Manchester United yesterday. The front cover of the match programme was inspired by the programme produced for the first game after Harding died in a helicopter crash on October 22, 1996.

A life-long supporter, Harding is credited with laying the foundations for the modern Chelsea.

Banners in the Matthew Harding Stand, renamed after his death, read: "MATTHEW HARDING'S BLUE AND WHITE ARMY" and "MATTHEW HARDING - ONE OF OUR OWN". Fans unfurled a large flag bearing his image.

"We also remember Matthew Harding this weekend," long-serving captain John Terry wrote in the match programme. "Yesterday was the 20th anniversary of his death and we will pay tribute to him today because this club owes so much to him. As well as a popular vice-chairman, he was a massive Chelsea fan and his family still are - I know some of them are guests of the club today. He has never been forgotten by this club or you supporters and it is fitting that the north stand bears his name. It would be great to win this one for him."

Harding died aged 42 when a helicopter taking him back from a League Cup game at Bolton Wanderers crashed, killing him and his three fellow passengers as well as the pilot.

LIPPI TO NET MILLIONS AS CHINA COACH: REPORT

Marcello Lippi will earn almost \$5 million a year as China coach but will pocket far more through a tie-in with a football academy, state media yesterday.

The 68-year-old Italian was named boss of the national team by the Chinese Football Association on Saturday and has the tricky goal of steering the Asian giant to qualify for the 2018 World Cup - a near impossible feat given recent losses to Uzbekistan and war-torn Syria.

Lippi's annual salary "should be in the region of 4.5 million euros (\$4.9 million)" said state broadcaster CCTV.

But the offer made to the Italian also includes income from Guangzhou Evergrande's football academy which will pay "Lippi and his team" 15.5 million euros annually to act as official "advisors" for the establishment, CCTV said.

The club, which is riding high atop the Chinese Super League, did not confirm the figure when contacted by AFP.

Dembele late show sees Celtic beat Rangers

Glasgow: Moussa Dembele grabbed a late winner as Celtic clinched a place in the Scottish League Cup final with a 1-0 defeat of Old Firm rivals Rangers at Glasgow's Hampden Park yesterday.

Rangers looked a much improved side from the one hammered 5-1 at Parkhead in their last meeting with arch-rivals Celtic in August, but it was the Hoops who had the best chances, with Erik Sviatchenko's header ruled out for a foul before Scott Sinclair crashed a free-kick off the bar.

The game looked to be heading for extra-time before Dembele, who grabbed a hat-trick on his Old Firm debut, added the finishing touch to substitute Leigh Griffiths's cross in the 87th minute. Celtic will join Aberdeen in the final after the Dons defeated Championship side Greenock Morton 2-0 in Saturday's first semi-final.

"I thought we were very dominant today in terms of chances and the quality of our game," Celtic manager Brendan Rodgers said. "If the chances don't go in you are always vulnerable to the counter-attack but I thought that every element of our play was at a high level."

Rangers manager Mark Warburton was pleased with the improvement from his players. "We're feeling disappointed and frustrated but I think there are a lot of positives to take out of the game. We've worked very hard to move forward as a team. The so-called gap is a lot narrower than people think and we have to learn from today's performance."

Rangers had selected full-backs Lee Hodson and James Tavernier down the right to deal with the pace of Sinclair and Kieran Tierney, which caused them so much damage in their September mauling by Celtic.

After a frantic start it was the Hoops who threatened first with Sinclair cutting in from the left to pick out Tom Rogic, whose deflected strike landed on the roof of the net.

Rangers were appealing for a penalty moments later when Barrie McKay went down under a challenge from Jojo Simunovic but referee Craig Thomson instead booked him for simulation, much to the fury of the Rangers players.

A slack pass was then intercepted by Dembele, who played Sinclair clean through, but Matt Gilks raced off his line to block his shot with his legs. Gilks breathed a sigh of relief when his attempted pass went straight to Rogic in the box, but the Australian couldn't find the target with his effort.

The Rangers keeper then redeemed himself as he made a point-blank save to keep out a close-range header from Dembele. The French striker was then lucky to avoid a booking for diving after he threw himself to the ground in the hope of a penalty as referee Thomson kept his cards in his pocket. Celtic had the ball in the net three minutes after the break when Sviatchenko headed Sinclair's cross past Gilks but Thomson adjudged that the Dane had fouled Rangers defender Clint Hill in the build-up.

Sinclair and Rogic then combined to carve the Rangers defence open but Gilks blocked the English winger's effort. Rangers had yet to threaten Craig Gordon's goal but the best chance of the match then fell to Jason Holt when Tavernier found him in the middle but his goal-bound effort was well blocked by Simunovic with McKay sending the follow-up straight into the hands of the Hoops keeper. Only a crossbar prevented Celtic from taking the lead in the 69th minute.

SERIE A

Kalinic hat-trick gets Fiorentina firing

Napoli beat Crotona to reduce their gap on leaders Juventus to four points



Napoli's Allan (left) vies with Crotona's Adrian Stoian during the Italian Serie A match at Ezio Scida stadium in Crotona yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Milan

Nikola Kalinic struck a hat-trick and Federico Bernardeschi hit a brace as Fiorentina's stuttering Serie A season finally took flight with a classy 5-3 win at Cagliari yesterday.

Elsewhere, 10-man Napoli added to the woes of basement side Crotona with a 2-1 win that reduced their gap on leaders Juventus to four points. Juventus had opened up a seven-point lead on Napoli last week after Maurizio Sarri's men were stunned 3-1 at home by Roma.

But Juve's 1-0 defeat to a resurgent AC Milan at the San Siro on Saturday, when teenaged midfielder Manuel Locatelli beat Gianluigi Buffon with a second-half scorcher, has breathed new life into the early season title race. Not all of Juve's rivals capitalised, however. Already winless in their past three games, Inter Milan were stunned by a late penalty at Atalanta that gave Gian Piero Gasperini's hosts their second big scalp three weeks after stunning Napoli 1-0 at home.

Inter invested heavily over the summer

and drafted Frank De Boer in to replace Roberto Mancini, but the Nerazzurri have dropped to 14th and are still 10 points off the lead.

Roma were to host Palermo late last night when a win for the capital club would hoist them back up to second place to sit ahead of AC Milan on goals difference. But yesterday another potential Juventus troublemaker joined the party. Despite making up for an opening day defeat to Juve with a 1-0 home win over Roma last month, Fiorentina travelled to Sardinia looking to end a four-game winless streak.

Cagliari were given the perfect start when Davide Di Gennaro beat Cipriano Tatarusanu with a bullet header from the edge of the box. But it only spurred the visitors into action. Kalinic pulled La Viola level on 20 minutes after a perfect run behind the hosts' defence to send a glancing header past Marco Storari.

Minutes later Kalinic turned provider from the left side of the area, the Croat curling a superb ball in behind the Cagliari defence for Bernardeschi to slot past the former Juventus number two at the back post. Fiorentina had their third goal in the space of 12 minutes, and Ber-

nardeschi his maiden brace in Serie A when he beat Storari with a superb snap shot from the edge of the area.

Kalinic had his second five minutes before the interval, the wiry striker coolly firing an unstoppable curler past Storari from Bernardeschi's unintentional pass. Kalinic secured his hat-trick eight minutes after the restart when he was allowed to rise unchallenged to send a powerful header past Storari from 10 yards out.

A pair of late goals from Marco Capuano and Marco Borriello proved too little too late. Fiorentina's third win of the season moved them up to 10th place.

Although nine points off the pace, Sousa's men have a game in hand after a game at Genoa was rained off earlier in the campaign.

Napoli's trip to league strugglers Crotona came in timely fashion following defeat in their last two league outings and a shock reverse to Besiktas in the Champions League in midweek. It took Napoli 17 minutes to break the deadlock, Jose Callejon beating Alex Cordex with an angled drive after Lorenzo Insigne's bouncing delivery from the left was missed by the hosts' entire defence.

On the half hour, Manolo Gabbiadini

lashed out with his right boot after a foul from behind by Giammarco Ferrari to earn a straight red card. But the hosts were given little time to capitalise, Nikola Maksimovic bundling home at the far post after the slightest of touches from the head of Kalidou Koulibaly at a corner for the visitors.

Aleandro Rosi hit a late consolation for the hosts but as Napoli moved up to third — four points behind Juve and one ahead of Roma — Crotona remain rooted to the bottom.

RESULTS

Udinese 3 (Theureau 9-pen, 71, Zapata 90+3-pen) Pescara 1 (Aquilani 74)
Atalanta 2 (Masiello 10, Pinilla 88-pen) Inter Milan 1 (Eder 50)
Cagliari 3 (Di Gennaro 2, Capuano 62, Borriello 77) Fiorentina 5 (Kalinic 20, 40, 53, Bernardeschi 26, 32)
Crotona 1 (Rosi 89) Napoli 2 (Callejon 17, Maksimovic 33)
Empoli 0 Chievo 0
Torino 2 (Falque 20, Ljajic 90+2-pen) Lazio 2 (Immobile 71, Murgia 84)
Played Saturday
Sampdoria 2 (Muriel 12, Izzo 47-og) Genoa 1 (Rigoni 24)
AC Milan 1 (Locatelli 65) Juventus 0

SPOTLIGHT

Ref got it wrong, slams Allegri as Milan stun Juve

AFP
Milan

Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri slammed refereeing officials after seeing Miralem Pjanic's goal chalked off as the champions were stunned 1-0 by AC Milan in a San Siro sizzler on Saturday night. The Turin giants had beaten Milan in the sides' last nine meetings and, in front of 75,829 spectators, showed throughout a stirring encounter why they are being tipped to claim a record sixth consecutive 'scudetto' title at the end of the season.

But Juve's failure to find a way past Milan's teenaged goalkeeper sensation Gianluigi Donnarumma proved costly, and the visitors were given few favours by referee Nicola Rizzoli on their way to a second successive San Siro setback just over a month after suffering a 2-1 reverse to Inter Milan.

Pjanic looked to have finally broken the deadlock for the visitors when he spun away in delight to celebrate beating 17-year-old Donnarumma with a rasping free kick just after the half-hour.

But the Bosnia midfielder's joy was short-lived. Milan's players surrounded Rizzoli claiming offside and after consultation with his touchline official he cancelled the goal.

Allegri said: "It's clear that our goal was valid. I shouldn't say it, but everyone will say it." He suggested Milan's protests had influenced the officials' decision.

"The first protests from Milan certainly put the pressure on, but we should focus on playing: anyway, this result shouldn't alter the path we're on. People say we played badly, but I feel that, tonight, we played well technically, and lost. I can't find fault with the lads, they controlled the game and created shots and goal-

scoring chances. We shouldn't worry about this result?"

Juve remain top but their second loss of the league campaign has added a new, dramatic twist to this season's fight for the Serie A title. Milan moved up to second to sit only two points adrift to signal their return to the fray after several seasons struggling to keep pace and falling down the pecking order in Europe.

The defeat also brought Juve within reach of Roma, runners-up in 2014 and 2015 and who could reclaim second place from Milan, and sit two points behind, if they account for Palermo late last night.

Milan fans, meanwhile, can look ahead with well-earned optimism. Montella's decision to inject his ageing side with former youth team players is paying dividends so far, and was given a further boost by Manuel Locatelli's stunning second-half strike that beat Gianluigi Buffon in the 65th minute.

"I really don't know how I did it, but I scored against the greatest goalkeeper in the world," said Locatelli, who two weeks ago was practically inconsolable at the final whistle after a similarly impressive strike in a 4-3 home win over Sassuolo. Montella, known as L'Aeroplanino (The Little Airplane) for the way he celebrated scoring goals while with Roma, had spent the past few seasons trying to hammer Fiorentina into title-contending shape.

He walked away from the club last year after a dispute with owner Andrea Della Valle, but has returned to Italy's top flight on a mission. After a bumpy start, the 42-year-old has transformed the hopes and dreams of a club that has been on a roller-coaster ride since even before Allegri, who led Milan to their last league title in 2011, was sacked in the wake of a stunning defeat to Sassuolo in January 2014.



AC Milan's Manuel Locatelli (centre) celebrates with his teammates Gabriel Paletta (left) and Ignazio Abate after scoring. (Reuters)

BUNDESLIGA

Leaders Bayern break Gladbach jinx, Leipzig go second

AFP
Berlin

Bayern Munich broke their Borussia Muenchengladbach jinx on Saturday night as Arturo Vidal and Douglas Costa netted in a 2-0 home win to put the champions two points clear.

First-half goals by Bayern's Chile and Brazil internationals gave Carlo Ancelotti's Munich a first win over Gladbach in five German league matches after Borussia claimed home and away league victories in 2015.

After back-to-back draws in the league the win caps a good week for Bayern, who enjoyed a 4-1 romp against PSV Eindhoven in the Champions League on Wednesday. "The first half was perhaps our best of the whole season," said Ancelotti. "The second wasn't quite so good and I told the players to be careful at the break as the energy wasn't 100% after the PSV game. They learnt the lesson from last weekend's draw with Frankfurt."

Ancelotti rested Germany forward Thomas Mueller from the starting lineup, but after Robert Lewandowski hit the post early on, Bayern went ahead after 16 minutes when Chile's Vidal headed home Rafinha's cross.

Winger Costa's 31st-minute shot doubled the lead at Munich's Allianz Arena, while Gladbach's best chance came when winger Andre Hahn hit the post on 71 minutes.

Yesterday, Guinea international Naby Keita scored twice as Bundesliga

newcomers RB Leipzig defeated Werder Bremen 3-1 to climb up to second place. Keita capped off a superb solo run to put Leipzig in front just before half-time, and the midfielder struck again on 74 minutes when he powered home a cross from former Bremen striker Davie Selke. Serge Gnabry gave the visitors hope as he cut the deficit in half almost immediately, but Germany Under-21 international Selke, who left Werder for Leipzig in July 2015, sealed the win deep into stoppage time.

Ralph Hasenhuettl's Leipzig extended their unbeaten start to their maiden campaign in the German top flight as they pulled to within two points of leaders Munich. Werder, who lost their first four matches this term, remained 14th in the table after seeing a three-game unbeaten run snapped.

Schalke were hosting Mainz in late game last night. Hoffenheim, like Bayern and Leipzig, also remain undefeated following an impressive 3-0 victory away to Bayer Leverkusen.

In other matches on Saturday, Hertha Berlin went third with a 2-1 home win over Cologne, who lost their unbeaten record.

Borussia Dortmund are three Bundesliga games without a win, although they fought back from two goals down to draw 3-3 at Ingolstadt and sit sixth. Dortmund were 2-0 down as Israel international Almog Cohen and Paraguay's Dario Lezcano netted for Ingolstadt. Cohen wriggled free of his marker from a free-kick before Lezcano looped his header into the top corner. Borussia hit back when Mario Goetze



Borussia Muenchengladbach's Fabian Johnson (left) and Bayern Munich's Arturo Vidal vie for the ball in Munich on Saturday. (AFP)

set up Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang to head home his seventh goal in his seven league games on 59 minutes, only for Lezcano to net Ingolstadt's third less

than 60 seconds later to make it 3-1. Dortmund dominated the final quarter as Adrian Ramos pulled a goal back on 69 minutes and Christian Pulisic

scored the crucial equaliser in stoppage time. The draw saw Ingolstadt climb off the bottom above Hamburg, who lost 3-0 to Eintracht Frankfurt on Friday.

RESULTS

RB Leipzig 3 (Keita 42, 74, Selke 90+5) Werder Bremen 1 (Gnabry 76)
Played Saturday
Bayer Leverkusen 0 Hoffenheim 3 (Demirbay 15, Wagner 49, Zuber 60)
Hertha Berlin 2 (Ibisevic 13, Stark 74)
Cologne 1 (Modeste 65)
Ingolstadt 3 (Cohen 6, Lezcano 24, 60)
Borussia Dortmund 3 (Aubameyang 59, Ramos 69, Pulisic 90+1)
Darmstadt 3 (Ben-Hatira 25, Kleinheisler 68, Sirigu 76) VfL Wolfsburg 1 (Gomez 60)
Freiburg 2 (Philipp 66, Petersen 78) Augsburg 1 (Altintop 84)
Bayern Munich 2 (Vidal 16, Costa 31) Borussia Muenchengladbach 0

FOCUS

Wenger rues Cazorla absence after goalless draw

AFP
London

Arsene Wenger bemoaned the absence of Santi Cazorla after Arsenal were held to a drab goalless draw by struggling Middlesbrough.

Cazorla did not feature at the Emirates Stadium on Saturday and the Spanish midfielder was sorely missed by the spluttering Gunners.

Arsenal were frustrated by Middlesbrough as they wasted a chance to win for a seventh successive Premier League game and eighth in all competitions.

"You always miss Cazorla at home. From deep midfield into the final third his pass is always quick, accurate," said Wenger, whose side were knocked out of first place after Manchester City drew against Southampton yesterday. "Cazorla, I don't really know when he will be back. We have to see how he recovers..."

There was better news on France striker Olivier Giroud who is now set to return for Arsenal's home League Cup game with Reading tomorrow.

"We didn't make enough from our set-pieces and crosses. So the first thing that comes to mind is whether a

guy with more size and physical presence in the box could have helped," said Wenger.

"But we have just come out of six straight wins so I wouldn't like to jump on this kind of excuse. We have to deal with what we face and unfortunately we are used to scoring. We are an offensive team.

"We had five or six offensive players on the pitch at the end but we didn't manage to score so it's a bit frustrating. It's part of the Premier League. The other day Manchester City had a similar possession against Everton and didn't win. We have to find a way to be efficient even when the games are like that."

Wenger, whose side had beaten Ludogorets 6-0 in the Champions League on Wednesday, saw the Gunners run out of ideas and it was his own goalkeeper Petr Cech forced into a string of saves.

"It is a game where you had a lot of possession but there were tired legs and you are prone to counter-attacks," said the Frenchman, who was celebrating his 67th birthday on Saturday.

"You make it difficult for yourself. 75 per cent possession but you could have lost the game, that is modern football. When you are not sharp, you lack

creativity in the final third. I must say, we gave everything but we did not have the legs today.

"The energy levels were a bit down but we were intelligent enough not to lose it. We were exposed at times. When you cannot win, you must not lose.

"They had chances but our goalkeeper saved us today. Petr Cech had a good performance in decisive phases. We tried. You don't win on command though. We lacked our creative potential around the box. That is part of it."

While Wenger was disappointed, Middlesbrough boss Aitor Karanka was delighted with the way his side played following a disappointing 1-0 loss to Watford last week.

"It was an amazing performance from my team," he said. "After the last defeat at home especially, it was tough for us. But we worked hard on the training field and today the plan worked really well. For me and for us it is great to come to the Emirates, and for the best Arsenal player to be Petr Cech.

"I think we should have won the game because we had good chances. We knew that we couldn't park the bus, but they have a lot of quality players. We were organised and our transition play was very good."



HECOMING

Klopp to hold talks with Gerrard to get him back to Anfield

'Gerrard is always so welcome at Liverpool FC, you can't imagine how welcome. So there is absolutely no problem. But anything we have, or will, speak about, stays (between us). That's how I know Stevie, that's how I am. But nobody should be worried that there is no space for Steven Gerrard. Everything will be fine, 100%'



AFP
Liverpool

Jurgen Klopp (right) will hold talks with former Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard after the 36-year-old midfielder appeared to announce his departure from the LA Galaxy at the end of the current Major League Soccer season.

Gerrard's comments are bound to fuel speculation that the highly popular Liverpoolian could return to play for the club he first represented 18 years ago and for whom he made over 500 appearances.

Klopp has previously indicated that such a possibility would not be realistic for the veteran although, following Saturday's 2-1 victory over West Bromwich Albion, the Liverpool manager declined to explain exactly what role could await a player who also made 114 England appearances in one

of the most successful careers of the modern football era.

"Stevie Gerrard is always so welcome at Liverpool FC, you can't imagine how welcome," said Klopp after his team's win at Anfield. "So there is absolutely no problem. But anything we have, or will, speak about, stays (between us). That's how I know Stevie, that's how I am. But nobody should be worried that there is no space for Steven Gerrard. Everything will be fine, 100%."

While it is understood Gerrard is keen to pursue a coaching career, it is believed that such a position will not be available under Klopp and that an ambassadorial role is the one likely to be on offer now to the Anfield great.

Gerrard, in an Instagram post, said: "Living in Los Angeles and playing for the great Galaxy supporters has been a privilege. You have made this place feel like home to me. This city and this club will always hold a

special place in my heart. Thank you."

Meanwhile, beaten West Brom manager Tony Pulis said Klopp could improve on the efforts of his predecessor Brendan Rodgers, who was narrowly beaten to the title in 2014, and end Liverpool's 27-year wait to be crowned champions of England.

"They're a good side," said Pulis. "Their front five are as good as anything in the league. They've got a free run at it this year (season). They're not in Europe which is draining, irrespective of what people say, I've been there myself. So they have a free run. The last time they came close, with Brendan, they had a free run as well and they have a free run at it this year."

Klopp saw his team edge closer to the top of the table with first-half goals against West Brom from Sadio Mane and Philippe Coutinho, only for a late consolation effort from Gareth McAuley to deny his team the two clear goals they needed to go above

leaders Arsenal.

"Who wants to be top in October?" said Klopp. "Okay, it was a little bit of a joke but we have 20 points and it was not possible to have more tonight, so that's okay."

"Maybe not having clean sheets is just part of our game, I don't know. It's not a big problem. Defending is, first of all, about not letting them create a lot of chances and I can't remember a lot of chances the last few games."

"In dreamland, then you always win 4 or 5-0 and then the crowd can go home a little bit earlier to do something more serious but I actually think this game created one of the best chances we have had here because it was exciting until the end."

"It's really difficult to be satisfied with any football game and, at 2-1, it keeps you more awake than at 4-0. That's just how it is. Maybe in this moment we're not experienced enough in a situation like this."

Sluggish Spurs worry Pochettino

Tottenham Hotspur manager **Mauricio Pochettino** admitted he is "concerned" after three successive draws called into question his squad's ability to stay the course in the Premier League and Champions League.

He acknowledged his players were not "fresh" in Saturday's goalless draw away to Bournemouth, which cost them the chance to top the Premier League table, especially in a sluggish opening 15 minutes.

Spurs had previously drawn 1-1 with West Bromwich Albion and 0-0 with Bayer Leverkusen, costing them momentum on both the domestic front and in Europe.

"Yes, we are concerned," Pochettino said. "It's true we need to improve if we want to be a real contender. It's true after two games away at West Bromwich and Bournemouth, you must win at least one."

"But when you analyse the whole situation, we have to give value to the point because the effort was fantastic. We had some injuries. So I am happy. "The game was very competitive and very tough. Bournemouth pushed us a lot, but we were not fresh from the beginning. Our start was very sloppy, but after 15 minutes we started to manage the game."

His defence coped adequately without the injured Toby Alderweireld, but the continued absence of Harry Kane and his ability to create and convert chances meant that Tottenham's goal threat was restricted largely to shots from range.

The news that Kane, who scored five goals against Bournemouth in two victories last season, is "not far away" from a full recovery from his ankle injury was encouraging, if vague.

"I'm very pleased after we played in the Champions League and before that in West Bromwich, two tough games, because the players made a very big effort," said Pochettino. "But we missed the

freshness to be sharp in the last third. Second half we dominated, but it was more difficult to create chances to score."

Pochettino said he did not see an incident in which substitute Moussa Sissoko caught Bournemouth's Harry Arter in the head with his elbow, which left home fans calling for a red card.

But he admitted that fatigue had contributed to four first-half yellow cards that left Jan Vertonghen, Danny Rose, Erik Lamela and Delle Alli one careless lunge from being sent off.

"We didn't show the freshness where you can anticipate the action," he explained. "We made some bad tackles. Maybe we deserved the yellow cards. But it wasn't bad intention, it was because we felt tired at the beginning."

Pochettino paid tribute to Bournemouth's game plan, which involved doing to Spurs what they usually do to opponents: press high up the field and beat them for energy and effort.

"I was really proud of the players today," Bournemouth manager Eddie Howe said. "Probably more proud than I was this time last week (when Bournemouth beat Hull City 6-1), partly because of the quality of the opposition we were playing against."

"Our game plan was to disrupt their rhythm, their normal way of playing. They're supremely talented players and we felt our best option was to stop the ball getting into the final third with our work rate and intensity. That's easier said than done, but the players delivered an incredible physical performance, full of endeavour and desire."

On the topic of physical performance, Jack Wilshere, on loan to Bournemouth from Arsenal, completed the full 90 minutes for the first time in two seasons. "I kept him on because his performance warranted it," Howe said. "His fitness has improved to the point where he is able to deliver that."



SPOTLIGHT

Kerber outlasts Cibulkova in WTA Finals opener

Kerber edges out Cibulkova in three-set marathon, Halep races to easy victory over Keys

Reuters
Singapore

Angelique Kerber was forced to dig deep in her WTA Finals opener before the German world number one battled past Dominika Cibulkova 7-6(5), 2-6, 6-3 in a high-class baseline slugfest at the Singapore Indoor Stadium yesterday.

Earlier, Simona Halep got her campaign off to a perfect start when the Romanian world number four dominated an erratic Madison Keys to kick off round-robin play in the elite eight-woman, season-ending event with a 6-2, 6-4 victory.

First-time finalist Cibulkova opened with a double fault and Kerber, who won two grand slam titles in 2016, took advantage of her opponent's nervy start to grab an immediate break without having to do much more than get the ball over the net.

By contrast, the German found her rhythm right away as she located the corners with ease and used her brilliant retrieving skills to make Cibulkova always play an extra shot when it appeared the point had already been won.

The Slovakian, who won her third title of the year in Linz earlier this month, slowly worked her way back into the set with her high-intensity game and pressured Kerber enough to make her cough up two double faults to tie things up at 4-4.

The pair were now slugging it out on the baseline and after both held serve through to a tie-breaker, Kerber kept her nerve in the face of some tremendous pressure to edge ahead in the thrilling encounter.

Undeterred, Cibulkova made a fast start to the second set as Kerber wavered, breaking her opponent twice in a row to race into a 4-0 lead and, while the German threatened to mount a comeback, the seventh seed drew level with a forehand winner.

DOMINANT HALEP

With exhaustion kicking in and the points growing shorter, Kerber recovered after suffering an early break and showed the class befitting the world's top-ranked player to reel off four straight games on her way to a hard-fought victory.



Angelique Kerber of Germany celebrates after defeating Dominika Cibulkova of Slovakia yesterday. (Reuters)

"I was trying to stay focused in the third set, trying to play my game and be aggressive. That was my plan and it worked well... it was a really close and really tough match," Kerber said.

In the opening Red Group match, diminutive Romanian Halep drew first blood in the third game, putting pressure on

Keys's backhand side with pinpoint accuracy and converting her fourth break point when the American plonked a weak drive into the net.

Buoyed up by the early breakthrough, Halep went for the kill and rattled off the next 11 points on her way to a decisive 5-1 lead as Keys's game unravelled, riddled with unforced errors.

Keys, on her first visit to Singapore, continued to mix winners with mistakes and, after trading breaks midway through the second set, a fired-up Halep broke again in the ninth game before serving out the contest in a little more than an hour.

"It's always the same with Madison... she's very strong and hits the ball hard so it's tough to

match her power," said Halep. "So I have to adjust, be strong with my legs and make the most of my chances."

Defending champion Agnieszka Radwanska opens her campaign against Russia's Svetlana Kuznetsova today with Garbine Muguruza and Karolina Pliskova completing the White Group.

FOCUS

Del Potro wins first title in three years

AFP
Stockholm

Former US Open champion Juan Martin del Potro clinched his first ATP title in almost three years with a 7-5, 6-1 victory over American Jack Sock in yesterday's final in Stockholm.

The Argentine, who won at Flushing Meadows in 2009 before suffering a series of wrist injuries that pushed him to the brink of retirement, needed just over an hour and a quarter to beat sixth-seeded Sock.

Del Potro, runner-up to Andy Murray in the Olympic final in Rio in August, last played a tour final in Sydney in January 2014, when he beat home favourite Bernard Tomic 6-3, 6-1.

The world number 63 played just six tournaments across 2014 and 2015 but has gradually rediscovered the form that once enabled him to reach fourth in the world. The 28-year-old helped his country defeat Murray's Great Britain in this year's Davis Cup semi-finals and will seek to lead Argentina to their first title against Croatia next month.

Gasquet wins Antwerp title

France's Richard Gasquet beat Argentina's Diego Schwartzman in straight sets 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 to

win the inaugural ATP tournament in Antwerp yesterday and claim his 14th career title.

It is Gasquet's second trophy of the season after the 30-year-old won on home court in Montpellier back in February.

Currently ranked 19th in the world, Gasquet came into the Antwerp hard-court event as the third seed and he overcame the unseeded Argentine in just under an hour and a half, breaking his opponent three times. Schwartzman, a winner in Istanbul earlier this year, had overcome home favourite and top seed David Goffin in the semi-final.

Niculescu wins Luxembourg title for 'best moment of life'

Romania's Monica Niculescu defeated two-time Wimbledon champion and top seed Petra Kvitova 6-4, 6-0 yesterday to win the Luxembourg WTA title, describing it as the "best moment of her life".

It was a first title of 2016 for the unorthodox player who was a finalist at the event in 2011 and 2012. "It was my best match this year," said Niculescu.

"I felt fantastic on the court, and after I took the first set I felt even better. I felt like nothing surprised me.

"But, wow, to beat Petra in the final? That's the best moment in my life, I think."



Juan Martin Del Potro reacts as he lifts the heavy trophy during an award ceremony after defeating USA's Jack Sock at the ATP Stockholm Open final in Stockholm yesterday. (AFP)

Gritty Carreno Busta wins Kremlin Cup

Sixth-seeded Spaniard Pablo Carreno Busta battled back from a set down to defeat unseeded Fabio Fognini and win the Kremlin Cup in Moscow yesterday.

Carreno Busta, ranked 36th in the world, won 4-6, 6-3, 6-2 in one hour and 54 minutes to record his second triumph over the 29-year-old Italian in as many meetings and claim his second ATP title this season. Fognini, who saw off three seeds in succession on his way to the final, started confidently, breaking Carreno Busta's serve twice for a one-set lead in 30 minutes.

The second set was a mirror reflection of the first as the 25-year-old Spaniard also broke twice to level at one-set all after one hour 14 minutes on court.

In the third Carreno Busta underlined his supremacy on the hard court of Moscow's Olympic indoor arena to claim the match and the title after two more breaks of serve.

He becomes the first Spaniard to lift the Kremlin Cup.

BOTTOMLINE

Kuznetsova last minute qualification bittersweet

AFP
Singapore

Qualifying for the elite WTA Finals in Singapore proved bittersweet for Kremlin Cup winner Svetlana Kuznetsova after she sent Britain's Johanna Konta packing before she even played a match.

Restricted to the world's top eight ranked players, Kuznetsova's last-gasp win in Moscow saw her leapfrog Konta to clinch the last spot.

Konta opted not to play last week because of a niggling injury so came to Singapore early to prepare, only to miss out at the last minute.

"It's horrible. It's very strange. It's never happened to me in my life," Kuznetsova told reporters after she jetted into Singapore yesterday.

"When I was playing, definitely I was not thinking of somebody who I can kind of take out," she said, adding that she

was "really sorry" for Konta, one of the most improved players in women's tennis.

The mad scramble for the eighth spot following a grueling 10-month season only came about last week after world number two Serena Williams pulled out of the event, citing a shoulder injury.

Describing her qualification as a bonus, Kuznetsova will be appearing in the tournament for the first time since 2009, although she faced a logistical nightmare getting to Singapore from her Russian homeland.

Within hours of winning the Kremlin Cup, Kuznetsova was rushing to Moscow airport to catch her connecting flight to Southeast Asia.

She arrived yesterday and with no time to spare, went straight to the practice courts to try and shake off the jetlag before her opening match against defending champion Agnieszka Radwanska today.

"I try not to think about it. I came to Moscow from Tianjin

and I went straight to practice; here, the same thing. I think my body doesn't know what's going on already," she said.

Sharapova to face Muguruza in exhibition tie

Banned five-time Grand Slam champion Maria Sharapova will face French Open winner Garbine Muguruza on a half clay-half grass court exhibition in Madrid on December 2.

Sharapova is not free to compete on the WTA Tour until at least April 2017 despite having a doping ban for banned medication meldonium cut from 24 to 15 months by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) earlier this month.

The Russian made her return to the court for the first time since receiving the ban for testing positive at the Australian Open in January in a light-hearted exhibition featuring Martina Navratilova and John McEnroe in aid of the Elton John Aids Foundation in Las Vegas last week.



Russia's Svetlana Kuznetsova celebrates after defeating Australia's Daria Gavrilova during the Kremlin Cup tennis tournament final in Moscow. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Brilliant Thomas defends CIMB title

Thomas overturns 4-shot deficit to defend title, Lahiri challenge ends after quadruple-bogey nine

Reuters
Kuala Lumpur

Justin Thomas fired a final round eight-under-par 64 to overturn a four-shot deficit at the start of the day and successfully defend his CIMB Classic title in Malaysia yesterday.

The 23-year-old American capitalised on overnight leader Anirban Lahiri's quadruple bogey nine on the par-five third hole to retake a lead he had held over the first two days before easing clear to win by three shots with a 23-under total.

"This is what you play for, to get into these situations and handle them well, like I did, and it's just a great start to the year," Thomas said in a greenside interview after sealing victory in the second event on the 2017 PGA Tour calendar.

Lahiri was searching for a maiden PGA Tour win at the TPC Kuala Lumpur course but the five-shot swing after he lodged his tee shot in a tree left the Indian with too much to do and he had to settle for a tie for third, four strokes back.

Japan's Hideki Matsuyama birdied the last two holes to sign for a 66 and claim second place on 20-under, with Lahiri (72) and American first round co-leader Derek Fathauer (67) rounding out the top four a further shot adrift.

After looking imperious in the first two rounds, Thomas suffered a mid-round meltdown on Saturday when he dropped four shots in three holes before a run of five consecutive birdies from the 14th kept him in touch with a surging Lahiri.

STRIKING DISTANCE

Thomas maintained his hot streak on Sunday with four birdies on his opening five holes to forge a two-shot lead over his faltering Indian playing partner and the American felt the closing stretch the previous day had set up his victory charge.

"I felt like maybe that was the biggest five holes I had played in my life because it gave me a chance," he added.

"If I am going into today eight or nine back then I have no chance, so it gave me a lot of momentum and kept me in striking distance."

Thomas managed to keep his challengers at bay with some solid scrambling after the turn before an exquisite approach from 108 yards set up birdie on 16. He moved four clear of the field when he sank a monster



Justin Thomas of the US poses with his trophy after winning the 2016 CIMB Classic golf tournament in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. (AFP)

putt on the next.

"I had little stretch there yesterday where I played pretty poorly but (caddy) Jimmy (Johnson) did an unbelievable job this week keeping me calm when it got tough... I made some key up and downs on 12 and 13 and it feels great," Thomas added.

Australia's Marc Leishman fired a six-under 66 to finish alone in fifth place on 17-under, one ahead of American Keegan

Bradley (68), who wilted on the back nine after climbing into contention going out.

The \$7mn limited field event is co-sanctioned by the Asian Tour. (Writing by John O'Brien in Singapore; Editing by Nick Mulvenney)

Leading scores

- 265—Justin Thomas (USA) 64-66-71-64
- 268—Hideki Matsuyama (JPN)

- 69-64-69-66
- 269—Derek Fathauer (USA) 64-70-68-67, Anirban Lahiri (IND) 66-66-65-72
- 271—Marc Leishman (AUS) 69-65-71-66
- 272—Keegan Bradley (USA) 64-72-68-68
- 273—Scott Hend (AUS) 74-69-63-67, Tyrone Van Aswegen (RSA) 69-70-66-68
- 274—James Hahn (USA) 69-64-69-72

- 275—Kim Si-Woo (KOR) 70-66-73-66, Aaron Baddeley (AUS) 67-71-69-68, Rafa Cabrera Bello (ESP) 69-67-69-70, Adam Scott (AUS) 70-69-66-70, Ryo Ishikawa (JPN) 69-68-68-70, Scott Piercy (USA) 68-68-67-72, Russell Knox (SCO) 70-63-68-74
- 276—Ian Poulter (ENG) 71-69-69-67, Ryan Moore (USA) 71-65-70-70, Sergio Garcia (ESP) 67-72-67-70, Emiliano Grillo (ARG) 74-65-66-71.

BLUE BAY TOURNAMENT

Lee keeps rivals at bay for China win

AFP
Beijing

Australia's Minjee Lee beat back stiff competition from rivals to land her third LPGA victory at the Blue Bay tournament on China's Hainan Island yesterday.

Lee carded a two-under par 70 to win by one stroke at 13-under par, one ahead of Jessica Korda and two ahead of Thailand's Ariya Jutanugarn on the par-72 course.

Lee and Korda shared the leaderboard top spot heading into the final round, but the 20-year-old from Perth edged ahead of the American Sunday, firing a birdie at the first hole.

At the par-three seventh hole a birdie by Lee and a bogey by Korda extended that lead to three and the Australian closed out the tournament with rounds of 65-67-73-70 for a total of 275.

Lee is projected to move up in the Rolex Women's World Golf rankings after her Blue Bay win. Having pocketed the \$315,000 first prize, she has almost \$2 mn in career earnings since turning professional in 2014.

"I feel like I've been playing really solid golf the whole year. I know I won in Hawaii, but getting a win this week, it feels really good. Just really happy," said Lee on her win. "I'm glad I came out on top but it was a really good fight out there."

Korda can take heart in her performance, carding 67-72-66-71 and a total of 276 for her best finish of 2016, as she prepares for the SIME Darby

LPGA in Malaysia where she is defending champion.

"I have three events left. I'm going to go back and rest right now. Next week is another hot week and then I have Japan and CME," Korda said about the remainder of her season.

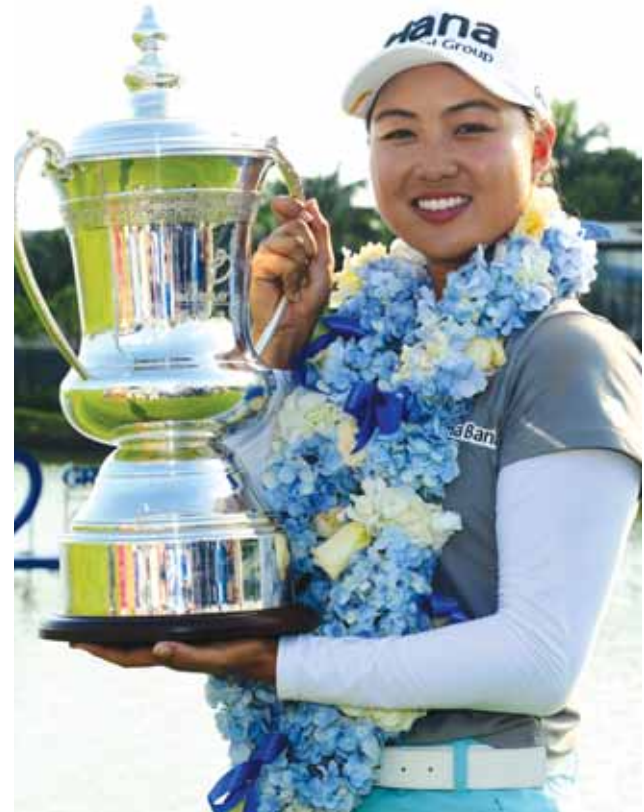
"So I would say that, you know, looking back at this week, I think considering we had zero preparation for the tournament and came in on Wednesday, I think I would have taken a second place if you would have told me that that's what I would have gotten."

Korda and players who competed in last week's LPGA KEB Hana Bank Championship arrived on-site for the Blue Bay LPGA on Wednesday due to a typhoon in the area.

Jutanugarn posted a final round two-under par 70 to finish third for her 14th top ten finish of the year, including five victories.

Leading scores

- 275—Minjee Lee (AUS) 65-67-73-70
- 276—Jessica Korda (USA) 67-72-66-71
- 277—Ariya Jutanugarn (THA) 71-71-65-70
- 282—Pornanong Phatlum (THA) 71-70-69-72, Caroline Masson (GER) 69-69-71-73
- 283—Charley Hull (ENG) 72-70-72-69
- 284—Pernilla Lindberg (SWE) 72-71-69-72
- 285—Brooke Henderson (CAN) 69-75-70-71
- 286—Kris Tamulis (USA) 71-73-70-72
- 287—Marijo Uribe (COL) 77-70-71-69.



Minjee Lee of Australia poses with her trophy after winning the Blue Bay LPGA tournament at Jian Lake Blue Bay Golf Course in Sanya on China's Hainan Island yesterday. (AFP)

FOCUS

Irishman Harrington triumphs in Portugal

AFP
Vilamoura, Portugal

Padraig Harrington defied defending champion Andy Sullivan to win the Portugal Masters yesterday for his first European Tour title in eight years.

The three-time major winner, 45, refused to cave in under pressure to card a closing bogey-free 65 to get to 23 under and hold off the charging Englishman Sullivan by one shot.

The semi-retired Anders Hansen and Finn Mikko Korhonen - who secured his playing privileges after starting the week 116th on the Race to Dubai - were tied third in Vilamoura.

"It's a big win. Portugal Masters is a big tournament. I've been coming here for 10 years so I've always liked it down here," the veteran Irishman Harrington said.

"There's so many Irish people here. It always felt like a home away from home, so it's really nice to win the tournament."

Harrington, who was languishing down in 159th in the

world rankings coming into the tournament but could now burst back into the top 100, added: "I tried to be really aggressive. The golf course suited me and I just tried to go after every pin I could and make birdies."

"I have a pretty good short game that was on form this week. No matter where I hit it, I felt like I could get it up and down."

The victory takes Harrington's European Tour tally to 15 wins and moves him to tied 15th on the all-time list.

Korhonen needed to finish in the top 26 to have a chance getting into the top 111 on the Race to Dubai and keep his card and he did that in style, with Australian Jason Scrivener and Englishman Oliver Fisher - who started the week at 113th and 114th respectively - also keeping their cards.

Craig Lee and Eddie Pepperell had missed the cut and they were the men to drop out of the top 111 along with Zander Lombard who was not playing this week.

English duo Robert Rock and Chris Paisley finished at 20 under alongside Scot Paul Lawrie and American David Lipsky, with Spaniard Nacho Elvira a

further shot back.

Fisher and Frenchman Benjamin Hebert then closed out the top ten at 18 under.

Sullivan made a stunning start, birdieing four of his first five holes to get to 20 under, while Korhonen birdied the second and fourth and when Hansen had gains on the fourth and fifth, there was a three-way tie at the top.

A brilliant bunker shot from Harrington helped set up a birdie on the second but when Hansen made a third birdie in a row on the sixth, the Irishman found himself three shots off the lead.

He cut that gap to two with a birdie on the seventh and then holed an exquisite bunker shot on the 11th before following it with another birdie on the 12th. Sullivan had also taken advantage of the par five and once again, there were three players at the top of the leaderboard.

Harrington spun his approach on the 14th back to five feet to move ahead but Sullivan took an aggressive line over the water on the 17th and joined him at 22 under.

A third birdie of the week on

the penultimate hole followed from Harrington, however, and he parred the last to claim a dramatic victory.

Korhonen had dropped a shot on the seventh but made two birdies on the back nine while Hansen finished his round with 12 pars.

Leading final-round scores

- 261 - Padraig Harrington (IRL) 66-63-67-65
- 262 - Andy Sullivan (ENG) 67-61-69-65
- 263 - Anders Hansen (DEN) 67-66-62-68, Mikko Korhonen (FIN) 64-67-64-68
- 264 - David Lipsky (USA) 64-66-69-65, Chris Paisley (ENG) 65-67-65-67, Robert Rock (ENG) 67-66-67-64, Paul Lawrie (SCO) 66-66-65-67
- 265 - Ignacio Elvira (ESP) 65-67-67-66
- 266 - Benjamin Hebert (FRA) 70-66-66-64, Oliver Fisher (ENG) 66-67-69-64
- 267 - Simon Khan (ENG) 69-67-64-67, Marc Warren (SCO) 63-65-70-69, Stephen Gallacher (SCO) 67-68-64-68, Lucas Bjerregaard (DEN) 67-67-70-63, Jens Fahrbring (SWE) 65-64-70-68.



Irish golfer Padraig Harrington holds his trophy after winning the Portugal Master at Oceanico Victoria golf course in Vilamoura yesterday. (AFP)

BASEBALL

Cubs fans dare to dream as Chicago's 'lovable losers' go to World Series

Chicago's North Side down Dodgers 5-0 to win the National League for the first time in more than 70 years

Reuters
Chicago

Jubilant fans of the Chicago Cubs erupted in celebration on Saturday when the franchise clinched a berth in this year's World Series, pumped up by the dizzying prospect that their team could win Major League Baseball's top prize for the first time since 1908.

Chicago's North Side turned into a roving street party as thousands of people wearing "Cubbie" blue spilled out of Wrigley Field after witnessing the team vanquish the Los Angeles Dodgers 5-0, giving the Cubs the National League championship for the first time in more than 70 years.

Long known as "lovable losers," the Cubs now have their sights set on an even more elusive prize: winning the franchise's first World Series title in more than a century and ending the longest drought of its kind in professional sports.

The relief felt by fans after Saturday's convincing victory over the Dodgers and their ace pitcher Clayton Kershaw was magnified by the team's agonising history of ineptitude, but that also tempered their excitement with the World Series looming.

"I've been waiting my whole life for this, I just wish my dad could have lived to see it," said Ryan Jones, 42, a fan from Chicago's western suburbs who wiped tears from his eyes while celebrating with his two sons outside of Wrigley.

"But as amazing as this feels, the Cubs still have a lot of work to do to win this."

Fireworks could be heard across the city after the Cubs turned a dramatic double-play to seal the win and continue a dominant season.

Don Cizek, 56, a fan from Chicago's suburbs who was celebrating outside of the ballpark, said he was cautiously optimistic after Saturday's victory.

"I had my hopes pinned on the Cubs closing it out tonight and I was chewing my knuckles right up to the end," he said.

"I can't believe we've finally made it. It's going to be a tough World Series against Cleveland but tonight we're going to party all night to celebrate."

Like the Boston Red Sox, who battled the so-called "Curse of the Bambino" after trading away legendary slugger Babe Ruth in 1920 to their arch rival New York Yankees, the Cubs have their



Chicago Cubs second baseman Javier Baez (second from right) and shortstop Addison Russell (right) celebrate with teammates after defeating the Los Angeles Dodgers in game six of the 2016 NLCS playoff baseball series at Wrigley Field in Chicago on Saturday. (USA TODAY Sports)

own bad luck legend: the "Curse of the Billy Goat."

In 1945, the owner of the Billy Goat Tavern, Billy Sianis, was supposedly asked to leave Wrigley because the smell of his pet goat was disturbing other patrons. Sianis allegedly vowed the Cubs

would not win any more, and the team has not returned to the World Series since losing that year to the Tigers.

For decades, the Cubs have played in iconic Wrigley Field where the 102-year old ballpark's ivy covered outfield wall and manual scoreboard served as back-

drop for memorable wins and crushing losses.

The team's diehard fans stuck with the team despite its failures. They watched, and waited, as Chicago's other sports franchises racked up championships. Even the cross town rival

White Sox ended their own decades-long title drought, winning the World Series in 2005.

'WITNESSING HISTORY'

The franchise boasts a number of famous fans as well, including comedian

and actor Bill Murray, Pearl Jam singer Eddie Vedder and actor John Cusack. President Barack Obama, who hails from Chicago, is a supporter of the White Sox.

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel called Saturday's win "absolutely incredible."

"Across Chicago and around the world generations of Cubs fans, from the very young to the very old, are celebrating tonight," Emanuel said in a statement.

"Rightfully so. We are witnessing history right before our eyes," he added.

Rev. Jesse Jackson, the Chicago-based civil rights leader, highlighted the historic meaning of Saturday's accomplishment as well.

"Ernie, this is for you. Cubs win. Cubs win!!!" he wrote in a Twitter message, referring to the late "Mr. Cub" Ernie Banks, the late Hall of Fame player who never went to the World Series in his 18 years with the team.

The Cubs have had a few close calls since 1945, including 1984, when Chicago was one win away from going to the World Series but lost three straight games to the San Diego Padres.

But perhaps their most painful loss came 13 years ago, when the team found itself in the same situation as it did on Saturday: playing Game Six of the National League Championship Series with a chance to make the World Series.

Leading 3-0 in the eighth inning, the Cubs collapsed after a fan named Steve Bartman tried to grab a foul ball that outfielder Moises Alou appeared to have a shot at catching.

Florida went on to score eight runs in the inning, and Chicago lost Game Seven the following day. Bartman became a symbol of the Cubs' cursed fortunes, though some fans defended him by pointing out that the team still led 3-0 at the time of his interference.

On Saturday, Cubs manager Joe Maddon, said the team was looking forward to the World Series, which begins Tuesday in Cleveland, Ohio. The Cubs will take on the Cleveland Indians in the best-of-seven series.

"Four more (wins) and we can really have a party," he said.

WORLD SERIES SCHEDULE

- Tomorrow: Cubs at Indians
- Oct 26: Cubs at Indians
- Oct 28: Indians at Cubs
- Oct 29: Indians at Cubs
- Oct 30: Indians at Cubs (if necessary)
- Nov 1: Cubs at Indians (if necessary)
- Nov 2: Cubs at Indians (if necessary)

COMMENT

I fear Dodgers are becoming baseball's most reliable losers

By Dave Schilling
The Guardian

What is baseball without superstition? Rally caps, no-hitters that dare not speak their name until the seventh, and, of course, the dreaded postseason curse. For decades, the unholy trinity of baseball curses was the Cubs, Red Sox, and Indians. If you needed a shorthand for comic futility, you couldn't go wrong with those three hapless franchises. There's a reason why Henry Rowengartner played for the Cubs after breaking his arm and magically developing an unhittable fastball in the movie Rookie of the Year; why the Cleveland Indians threatened to move to Miami in Major League. The lovable loser story is great for sportswriters and filmmakers, but terrible for fans. But the payoff is unparalleled. Just ask the 2004 Red Sox. In a couple weeks, ask the Indians or the Cubs. Just don't ask the Dodgers.

With the baseball gods about to give one of their two remaining Jobs a winter off from their perpetual misery, I'm starting to wonder where all of the self-loathing energy is going to go, and more and more, I'm seeing it fall directly into my lap here in southern California. I would much rather dispense with the entire notion of the sports curse, but that's like asking the sun to be a bit less hot all the time, or suggesting Donald Trump keep his little tiny hands to himself. There's just no point. Somewhere deep down, sports fans (and especially baseball fans) need to be tortured. It's why we bite our nails during tense play-off games, or, in my case, watch an entire

two innings of game 5 of the NLDS via the reflection of the TV in the glass table at a bar because the Nationals hadn't scored a run since I started doing it. Laugh all you want, but it worked.

Such is the life of a Dodger fan in 2016. Another year, another playoff disappointment. There's a culture of losing developing slowly here in Los Angeles. You can see it in the pained expressions of Dodger fans filing out of the stadium during the thorough drubbings of games 4 and 5 of the NLCS, the slow realisation that, no, this is not our year. Again. To coin a phrase, it's Clippers-esque, this run of playoff defeats. Whether it's a stout, efficient, humourless Cardinals team, the plucky Mets, the hard-nosed Phillies or this blessed Cubs bunch, someone's going to come to town ready to rip your heart out and give you a better reason to leave in the seventh inning than traffic.

Never have I seen a playoff crowd quite like game 4 at Dodger Stadium. LA walked into that game up 2-1 up on a Cubs team that looked unstoppable just a week ago. Even LA Times columnist and ESPN commentator Bill Plaschke had the gall to declare in no uncertain terms that "it's over" on Around the Horn the day after game 3, as though he actively wanted to see the Dodgers lose and was using some kind of reverse psychology to ensure his preferred result.

That sort of self-assured rhetoric certainly didn't extend to the tense crowd at Chavez Ravine on Wednesday. The vibe was nervy and joyless, one of expected defeat rather than impending victory. The rally towels they gave us walking into the park were used less to intimidate the opposing team and more



LA Dodgers' starting pitcher Clayton Kershaw reacts after giving up a solo home run to Chicago Cubs' Willson Contreras during the fourth inning of game six of the 2016 NLCS playoff baseball series in Chicago on Saturday. (USA TODAY Sports)

to wipe the blood off of our faces after a succession of haymakers connected with our collective jaw. But this has happened before, and it will happen again. This year marks the fourth play-off run in a row for the Dodgers. Four NL West Division championships. Four

thudding playoff exits.

These Los Angeles Dodgers have done a truly remarkable job piecing together a losing tradition to rival the pre-1955 Brooklyn Dodgers - a team that was duty-bound to fall on their sword for the New York Yankees, as

though they were programmed to do so like one of the robots from Westworld. It's been 28 years since the last Dodger World Series victory, which doesn't seem all that long ago compared to the runs put together by the Cubs, Red Sox, and Indians. The Dodgers have

won six championships, placing sixth on the list of most World Series victories. That makes them, at first glance, a dubious choice to assume the mantle of baseball's perennial groomsman, but what other team has been so close so many times in the last 20 years? Playoff disappointments in 1995, 1996, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2013, 2014, and 2015. Mike Piazza, Mannywood, and the McCourt family have all come and gone since 1988. Teams like the Brewers have significantly fewer play-off runs than that, but curse narratives are not about just being bad. They're about being bad when it really, really counts; close, but not close enough. Only the Oakland A's could claim to be more snakebitten in the postseason.

The underground hallways of Dodger Stadium are lined with trophies, plaques, and framed jerseys of Hall of Fame players. There's an idea of swagger, superiority, and historical significance buried within the psyche of Dodger Nation, though it gets buried deeper after every October meltdown. This is an old, proud franchise, but one that has been eclipsed by, of all teams, the hated San Francisco Giants. Giants fans laugh at division title celebrations and scoff when Kershaw is called the greatest pitcher of his generation when he's never pitched a single inning in the World Series.

Twenty-eight years will soon be 29, and then 30. We've got a long way to go before we hit 100 years of futility, but I implore the Dodgers front office that seems totally uninterested in finding long-term No2 and No3 starting pitchers or a truly dangerous clean-up hitter to consider one question: do you want to find out what that's like? I don't.

NHL

Rookie Harper scores twice in Panthers win

'That first one felt so good... relieved some pressure'



Shane Harper (right) of Florida Panthers celebrates his third period goal with teammate Gregg McKegg during their game against the Colorado Avalanche in Sunrise, Florida, on Saturday. (AFP)

By George Richards
The Miami Herald (TNS)

Shane Harper waited his whole life to score an NHL goal.

He only had to wait a few minutes to get his second.

Harper, the Florida Panthers' 27-year-old rookie, helped fuel Florida's 5-2 victory over the Colorado Avalanche at BB&T Center on Saturday night.

After the game, Harper held his special puck out for all to see. This is one puck that isn't going to be misplaced any time soon.

"It was quite a game," Harper said. "That first one felt so good. I had a couple of chances in the first and second so to get it... relieved some pressure."

Late in the second period of a 1-1 game, Harper and Greg McKegg got loose on a rush with Harper pushing through his first NHL marker. Early in the third, he got his second — this one giving Florida a 4-1 lead. Harper even got into his first NHL fight with 2:22 left.

"It was nice to get that out of the way, too, I guess," Harper said.

Harper is the first Florida player with

a multi-goal game this season as the Panthers' five goals was most so far this season.

It took a while for Florida's offense to get cooking Saturday with the Aves grabbing a 1-0 lead. For the second time in as many nights, the Panthers had a goal taken off the board only this time, it was the right call.

Down 1-0 in the first, Jason Demers' long shot beat Semyon Varlamov with Kyle Rau blocking only the Aves challenged and video showed Vincent Trocheck offside.

Florida bounced back in the second, tying the score early on after Aaron Ekblad literally slid into a Jaromir Jagr power play pass and beat Varlamov 90 seconds in.

Later, McKegg boosted the puck away from Colorado's Matt Duchene and got off to the races, feeding Harper on the breakaway.

"It was nice, we had been buzzing in the zone," McKegg said.

Harper made his NHL debut with the Panthers on opening night five games ago.

Florida continued its offensive assault in the third with Jonathan Marchessault making it 3-1 at 4:30 of the period; Harper got his second 51

seconds later.

Duchene scored moments after Harper, yet Trocheck's third goal of the year put the Aves away.

The Panthers embark on their first real road trip of the season — all five games so far have been inside the Sunshine State — Tuesday in Pittsburgh. Florida will visit the defending Stanley Cup champion Penguins, Toronto, Buffalo and Detroit before returning to Sunrise.

"It was a good game," coach Gerard Gallant said. "[Harper] found the back of the net twice for us and that was great. The kid works hard, he went hard to the net and was rewarded. It was good to see."

RESULTS

Chicago	5 Toronto	4 (SO)
Montreal	4 Boston	2
Tampa Bay	4 Ottawa	1
Detroit	3 San Jose	0
Florida	5 Colorado	2
New Jersey	2 Minnesota	1 (OT)
Philadelphia	6 Carolina	3
NY Rangers	4 Washington	2
Nashville	5 Pittsburgh	1
Columbus	3 Dallas	0
Los Angeles	4 Vancouver	3 (SO)
St. Louis	6 Calgary	4

FOCUS

Gretzky skates for Oilers again in outdoor alumni loss

AFP
Montreal

Wayne Gretzky, the all-time National Hockey League scoring leader, returned to the ice in an Edmonton Oilers jersey Saturday at age 55 for an outdoor alumni game against Winnipeg.

The Canadian legend was among a host of retired standouts who took the ice for the Oilers and Winnipeg Jets in an exhibition game ahead of Sunday's NHL Heritage Classic between the current editions of the Jets and Oilers at the home stadium of the Canadian Football League's Winnipeg Blue Bombers.

The Jets won 6-5 as Winnipeg's Teemu Selanne, the 46-year-old Finnish Flash who ended his career in 2014, scored on a penalty shot against Edmonton's Curtis Joseph with three seconds remaining. Selanne had two goals and three assists.

"What a great experience," Gretzky said. "We had a wonderful day, just enjoyed playing the game."

Gretzky, who retired in 1999 with records of 894 goals and 1,963 assists, led the Oilers to four Stanley Cups before being traded to Los Angeles in 1988. He later

played for the St. Louis Blues and New York Rangers.

But he lamented not playing better, complaining, "I stink. I'm really bad," and shaking his head as he watched former teammate Mark Messier score twice.

"I was, like, 'Oh my God, (Messier) can still play. Nobody's thinking that about Wayne Gretzky,'" he said.

"I don't play hockey any more. I love when I do go out there. But I'm 56 in two months and that might have been my last game. It's hard now. It's just tough to tie up your laces."

Gretzky had said such things before but suited up for the Oilers alumni in 2003 at Edmonton ahead of the first Heritage Classic outdoor game, helping the retired Edmonton stars defeat a similar Montreal squad 2-0 on the eve of the NHL's first outdoor contest.

"I didn't have any expectations and I didn't tell anybody that I was going to go out there and be the Wayne Gretzky of the '80s," Gretzky said of his Winnipeg effort.

"There's only one NHL and when I retired from there, that was it. I don't have the same excitement to go play pick-up hockey with the buddies."



NBA

Simmons part of global revival plan for 76ers

AFP
Washington

Australia's Ben Simmons, last June's NBA Draft top pick now sidelined by a fractured right foot, is part of a global initiative aimed at reviving the NBA's woeful Philadelphia 76ers.

Alongside fellow NBA newcomers Joel Embiid of Cameroon and Dario Saric of Croatia, Simmons will be called upon to help advance the fortunes of a club that went an NBA-worst 10-72 last season, barely beating the all-time worst full-season record of 9-73 set by Philadelphia's 1972-73 squad.

Just four seasons after winning just nine games, the 76ers made a run to the 1977 NBA Finals. A decade after the NBA's worst-ever season, they were league champions. It's that magic the Sixers seek to repeat as new young talent matures.

In the 33 seasons since the 1983 crown, the 76ers reached the finals only in 2001, losing to the Los Angeles Lakers. Over the past 13 seasons, they have won only one playoff series. They haven't reached the playoffs since the labor-dispute shortened 2012 campaign. They haven't had a winning 82-game season since 2004-05.

So it's no wonder that Simmons, who broke his right small toe September 30 in the 76ers' last training camp scrimmage, had an update posted on Instagram that sounds like the same sort of message the team needs.



"Turning a negative into a positive is never easy," Simmons wrote. "Thanks to everyone for the support and love. Looking forward to coming back stronger and better."

Sixers coach Brett Brown said that Simmons is in a walking boot and conducts his rehabilitation work in the team's training complex, emphasizing learning about the NBA, improving his

health and working on his shooting.

"There's a portion that is education, where we will sit and show him different things on tape and educate him in the league. It's classroom stuff," Brown said.

"And then there's stuff where he will sit in a chair and get his elbow under the ball until he can actually stand, where we have a chance to help grow his shot."

In an NBA general managers poll, 70 percent said that in five years, Simmons will be regarded as the top player from this year's NBA rookie class.

EMBIID, SARIC ADJUST TO NBA

The 76ers have barely said hello to Embiid, the 22-year-old, 7-foot (2.13m) center they selected third in the 2014 draft, but he has scored 10.3 points and grabbed 5.5 rebounds a game in pre-season play.

"As far as game shape wise, I'm not 100 percent," Embiid said. "I still get tired. In practice, we've got to work on that."

Embiid says he is quickly adjusting to the NBA's speed and physical style.

"When I look out on the floor, I don't see him take plays off," Brown said. "He's really trying to push himself. I feel like he is on path to arrive on opening night in a really good place."

Saric, 22, was taken 12th by Orlando in the 2014 NBA Draft but played in Turkey the past two seasons before signing with the 76ers in July. He is averaging 8.4 points and 4.0 rebounds in NBA pre-season games.

Saric seeks consistency after shooting 9-of-13 in two pre-season games, then going 2-for-19 until making his last three in a row.

"I rush the last couple games," Saric said. "Maybe because I'm still young, I tried to maybe show the people I can shoot, I can play maybe because I'm a little so excited to show everything. Maybe I need to slow down, step-by-step, and if I do that, I think everything will be fine."

Rockets lose guard Beverley for opening six weeks

Patrick Beverley, the Houston Rockets' backcourt starter alongside top scorer James Harden, will miss at least 20 games to start the NBA season with a left knee injury. Rockets coach Mike D'Antoni said Beverley will miss the first six weeks of the upcoming campaign, which begins for Houston on Wednesday at the Los Angeles Lakers.

Eric Gordon, Tyler Ennis, P.J. Hairston and K.J. Daniels figure to share time at point guard in place of 28-year-old Beverley, who averaged 9.9 points, 3.4 assists and 3.5 rebounds a game last season. Beverley's lone pre-season game for the Rockets came October 2 against the Shanghai Sharks when he had five points, six rebounds and five assists in a 131-94 victory.

The Rockets finished eighth in the Western Conference last season at 41-41 and lost to the eventual conference champion Golden State Warriors in the first round of the playoffs.

Houston lost center Dwight Howard in the off-season, the veteran signing with his hometown Atlanta Hawks.

Number-crunching US sport

The 2016-2017 NBA season gets under way this week. Here's a look at the numbers behind the world's most popular basketball league and its rival sports:

MONEY, MONEY MONEY

Top salaries in the National Basketball Association are among the highest across the world of team sports, with LeBron James due to pocket just under \$31m this season after negotiating a new three-year deal in August worth \$100m. James' salary compares favourably with the National Football League, the most-watched sport in the United States, where Indianapolis Colts quarterback Andrew Luck has the highest average salary at \$24.6m. According to the Spotrac website, which gathers data on players contracts and salaries, Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Clayton Kershaw draws the highest salary in Major League Baseball, earning \$34.5m in 2016.

Ice Hockey continues to lag behind the big three of American sport, with the game's biggest star, Pittsburgh's Canadian international Sidney Crosby, earning around \$10.9m per year. Elite NBA stars, meanwhile, remain the kings for generating endorsement dollars, with James signing a lifetime sponsorship deal with Nike in December 2015 that is expected to see him become a billionaire. *Forbes* magazine estimates James' 2016 endorsement earnings at \$54m, although his total earnings were still reported to be less than the world's highest paid football players — Cristiano Ronaldo (\$88m) and Lionel Messi (\$81.4m).

DRAWING A CROWD

With a staggering 2,430 matches in the regular season, Major League Baseball attracted around 73.1m through the turnstiles in 2016, an average of 30,168 per match. But in terms of average attendance, the National Football League continues to rule. With each team playing only 16 regular-season games, crowds average out at around 68,400 per game. The NBA meanwhile, played in smaller, indoor venues, attracted an average crowd of 17,481 a game in 2015-2016, a total of around 21.5m fans. By comparison, the leading football leagues of Europe hold up well, with England's Premier League attracting 13.8m spectators in 2015-2016, an average of 36,451 per match.

PULLING POWER

The National Football League remains the juggernaut of television viewing figures in the United States, with average audiences of 16.6m per game against 7.3m per NBA game. The gulf in viewing figures is even more stark when contrasting the numbers for the two sport's showcase occasions — the Super Bowl and the NBA Finals. Last year's NBA Finals thriller between the Cleveland Cavaliers and Golden State Warriors drew an average of 20.3m viewers, with a peak audience of 31m for the seventh and final match in the series won by the Cavs.

This year's Super Bowl — a fixture in the US sporting landscape which is akin to a national holiday — attracted 111.9m viewers. The difference in viewing numbers is reflected in the sums each sport is able to demand for television rights. The NFL earns around \$7.2bn a year through to 2022 while the NBA will earn \$2.7bn a season until 2025 — a massive increase on its previous deal of \$930m a year. Major League Baseball is a distant third at 1.5bn a year (four million viewers per match) with the NHL gleaming \$633m (1.8m viewers on average).

BILLIONAIRE'S CLUB

With its cavernous stadiums, giant television contract and the global pulling power of the Super Bowl, the NFL remains the most valuable league in American sport, according to *Forbes*. The league is worth an estimated \$74.8bn in 2016, with each franchise worth an estimated \$2.3bn. Major League Baseball is just ahead of the NBA in terms of overall value, at \$38.6bn (\$1.3bn per franchise) against \$37.4bn (\$1.2bn per team). The NHL is dwarfed by its three rivals, with a total value estimated at \$15.2bn, \$500m per team. According to *Forbes*, the Dallas Cowboys are the most valuable team in world sport at \$4.2bn, ahead of Real Madrid (\$3.65bn) and FC Barcelona (\$3.55bn), the two titans of European football. The New York Yankees baseball team weigh in at \$3.4bn with Manchester United, another commercial juggernaut, fifth at \$3.32bn. The New York Knicks are ranked the most valuable NBA team at \$3bn.

FOCUS

Giants, Rams lead NFL into new territory in London

Giants win the first non-rugby sports event in Twickenham's 107-year history



New York Giants' Dominique Rodgers Cromartie (right) celebrates an interception with Janoris Jenkins during the NFL International Series match against Los Angeles Rams at Twickenham Stadium in London, England, yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
London

Twickenham played host to the NFL's latest landmark moment yesterday as the New York Giants beat the Los Angeles Rams 17-10 at the cathedral of rugby union.

Fittingly for a sport that has its earliest roots in rugby, the NFL finally planted its flag at Twickenham, the historic London venue that usually serves as the headquarters of the England rugby team.

This was the first non-rugby sports event in Twickenham's 107-year history and a capacity crowd snapped up 74,121 tickets to witness the NFL's next step towards establishing a permanent franchise in London.

At a venue that has produced some of the most dramatic moments in rugby history, the Giants and Rams struggled to showcase the best of the NFL in a scrappy encounter encapsulated by an error-strewn display from Rams quarterback Case Keenum and illumi-

nated by a pair of crucial interceptions by Giants safety Landon Collins.

Yet the crowd, clad in jerseys of all 32 NFL teams, were unperturbed by the low-quality encounter and remained glued to their seats in a show of faith that suggests the league's target of having a Britain-based team by 2022 remains well within reach.

"I expect we'll see more games here (at Twickenham) and, who knows, maybe a franchise someday," NFL commissioner Roger Goodell told the BBC in an interview during the match.

After playing the previous 15 "International Series" fixtures at Wembley, Goodell arranged Twickenham's debut to explore the suitability of other host venues with a view to increasing the number of matches played in London each season.

This is the third successive year that three games are being played in London and the Jacksonville Jaguars are playing one "home" match at Wembley each season from 2013 to 2020.

Television networks in Britain report an 80% rise in NFL viewing figures from the same period last season,

while the league says there are now 14mn British fans of the sport.

APPROVAL RATINGS

Not content with British dominance, the NFL is playing a fixture in Mexico in November and Goodell is on record as saying he wants to take a regular-season game to China in the near future, with Germany and Brazil also potential venues.

Ironically, while business is booming overseas, the NFL's approval ratings back home in the United States have dipped, with viewing figures down this season.

The damaging publicity surrounding the NFL's failure to inform players of the potential dangers of concussions and a series of ugly domestic violence incidents featuring star players have turned fans off the sport.

Only this week the Giants were forced to leave their kicker Josh Brown out of the trip to England after fresh evidence emerged of his abuse of his now ex-wife.

None of that bothers the British fans, who left Twickenham fuelled by their latest taste of the NFL and

already anticipating the Cincinnati Bengals playing the Washington Redskins in this year's final UK fixture at Wembley next Sunday.

Mark Waller, the NFL's executive vice-president for international, believes the sustained interest shown by the British public proves the foundations have now been laid for a permanent team.

Referencing the Rams' move from St. Louis to a new home in Los Angeles earlier this year, he told reporters: "The minute two or three owners expressed a desire to be in Los Angeles it all happened in a remarkably fast time-frame."

"What I would like to think is we are doing the best job possible to make the market ready?"

However, US-based players might not embrace the move quite so readily, according to Giants defensive tackle Damon Harrison.

"That'd be tough," Harrison said. "The road teams would have to go 6-10 hours across the world. I think it would be good for football, but I'd have to stay in the States."

RUGBY

Plaudits for All Blacks while Wallabies 'sulk'

AFP
Auckland

The Australians were sour but elsewhere there was high praise for the All Blacks' world-record winning streak, with suggestions their unbeaten run is far from over.

The reigning world champions downed the Wallabies 37-10 in Auckland on Saturday to set a record for top-tier nations of 18 consecutive victories.

All Blacks coach Steve Hansen felt his Australian opposite Michael Cheika hijacked celebrations with a withering outburst targeting the referee, the news media and claiming the New Zealanders did not respect his Wallabies.

But Cheika was in the minority for not congratulating the All Blacks on their historic achievement.

"The All Blacks march on, fallible for sure, but buoyed by the self-assurance greatness bestows," wrote Paul Rees in London's *Observer*.

"The best, it is hard not to suspect, is yet to come."

London's *Telegraph* noted that less than a year after becoming the first team to win back-to-back World Cups "with a much-changed line-up, Steve Hansen's side bolstered their claim to being the greatest ever rugby team".

Among the flood of tributes for the All Blacks' unprecedented winning streak were tweets of congratulations from both the Irish Rugby Union and the British and Irish Lions.

The All Blacks need to win their next seven Tests, which include two against Ireland and three against the Lions, if

they are to break the outright record of 24 Tests held by Cyprus who compete in the European Nations Cup division 2B.

"Great contest from both sides. Congratulations @AllBlacks on your achievement," the Lions tweeted.

"@AllBlacks Congratulations on an incredible winning run," added Ireland who play New Zealand in Chicago and Dublin next month.

Former All Blacks captain Sean Fitzpatrick expected the winning sequence to continue, tweeting: "I suspect there will be a few more added 2 the total by this outstanding team".

Former Wallaby Stirling Mortlock tweeted that the All Blacks were "#toogood" while South African cricketer great Allan Donald added: "Simply have to applaud the way these men play there (sic) rugby".

Such was the All Blacks' superior finishing that they outscored the Wallabies six tries to one despite enjoying only 35 percent of possession and 32 percent of territory.

"That said, we saw enough of the real All Blacks to know that this side are still way ahead of the rest of the world and that they will continue to move upwards," wrote Steve James in London's *Telegraph*.

"Their fitness in the last quarter yet again proved irresistible."

In Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* Jamie Pandaram referred to the "extraordinarily ugly aftermath" to the Test which saw trans-Tasman relations plunge.

"Australian coach Michael Cheika claimed the Kiwis don't respect them while rival Steve Hansen told him not to get 'sulky'," Pandaram wrote.



New Zealand's TJ Perenara (centre) performs the haka during the rugby Test against Australia at Eden Park in Auckland on Saturday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Springbok coach hails England side ahead of Twickenham Test

Reuters
Johannesburg

South Africa's rugby coach Alister Coetzee hailed the impact of Eddie Jones and the performance of England this year as the Springboks began their preparations for a four-match tour of Europe next month that includes a Test at Twickenham.

"I've gone through the England tour to Australia. They really played well and focused on a few areas and they've got better and improved. Eddie's done a great job with that," said Coetzee of England's 3-0 triumph in June and the changes made to the team since Jones took over as coach just under a year ago.

"First of all they have belief back in their team; a pack that is a monstrous pack and is a very physical pack. And then... solid defence and to play with two players at 10 and 12 who can kick a mile and put the opposition under territorial pressure and ask the Australians to run from deep. On top of that a 95 percent successful kicker in Owen Farrell.

"So that is what we will be facing. It sounds all dark and that but we will plan and prepare well. And we will always give ourselves a chance, even going to face the number two side in the world," Coetzee told a media conference yesterday.

South Africa face England at Twickenham on Nov. 12 in the key match of their four-game tour. They start at Wembley a week earlier against the Barbarians and also meet Italy in Florence on Nov. 19 and Wales in Cardiff on Nov. 26.



"But the Baabaas game is the most important to set the tone for the rest of the tour. This is a series where we'll have to take it one Test a time."

South Africa named a separate, less experienced squad for the Barbarians match and will bring in key overseas-based players for the three Tests that follow.

Coetzee said it would be business from the start for the beleaguered Boks, returning to work after a record thrashing from world champions New Zealand earlier this month.

"Just because it is not a Test against the Baabaas, we are not going there to entertain. That is the Baabaas' philosophy. We will play to lay the basis to get a successful tour off the ground. The Baabaas will test us but we have to make sure we stick to our processes of how to win Test match rugby."

South Africa began their preparations in Johannesburg yesterday as they assembled for a training camp ahead of their planned departure for London on Friday.

BOTTOMLINE

Three Barretts, two new faces, in All Blacks squad

AFP
Auckland

The All Blacks named two new players yesterday for next month's northern tour and included three Barrett brothers in their travelling squad as they look to extend their record unbeaten streak.

The 36-man squad to play Tests in the United States, Italy, Ireland and France, also includes the return of disgraced scrum-half Aaron Smith.

A day after beating Australia 37-10 to set a new benchmark for a top-tier team of 18 consecutive victories, coach Steve Hansen said the northern tour was a chance to extend the record.

"We've got a great opportunity to build on what we've done so far, going into a new environment. The northern hemisphere's a totally different place to play rugby," he said when naming the touring party.

"It will challenge us and ask us to grow our game in ways, and will give us the opportunity to continue to blend this group of young talent with the more experienced group. This will allow our game to continue to improve."

The uncapped All Blacks are Otago Highlanders hooker Liam Coltman and 19-year-old Rieko Ioane, who has graduated from the New Zealand Olympic sevens team.

Jordie Barrett, the 19-year-old younger brother of 46-Test fly-half Beauden Barrett, has been named as



New Zealand's Israel Dagg (foreground) celebrates a try with teammates Dane Coles and Beauden Barrett (right) during the third rugby Test against Australia at Eden Park in Auckland on Saturday. (AFP)

an "apprentice" to experience the pressures of being an All Black.

Hansen said the apprentice scheme, previously used with Ardie Savea in 2013, had "huge benefits" with Jordie Barrett, a fullback, destined to be an All Black in future.

"He is an outstanding prospect and has a big future in the game," Hansen said.

A third Barrett brother, Scott, will travel as cover for lock Sam Whitelock, who could be sidelined for three weeks with an ankle injury suffered in Saturday's Test against Australia.

The playing squad was largely pre-

dictable, including the return of loose forward Steven Luatua who played 14 Tests in 2013-2014 and who was in stand-out form for the Auckland Blues this year.

Scrum-half Smith returns after missing the last two Tests after an airport toilet tryst with a woman which New Zealand Rugby deemed "serious misconduct".

Coltman, who has provided injury cover for the All Blacks in the past, is officially selected for the first time with previous Test hookers Nathan Harris and James Parsons not considered because of injury.

ITINERARY

- Nov 6 v Ireland in Chicago
- Nov 13 v Italy in Rome
- Nov 20 v Ireland in Dublin
- Nov 27 v France in Paris

CYCLING

Sutton says he is confident Wiggins will be exonerated

Wiggins has been in the spotlight since leaked medical data showed the five-time Olympic champion had been granted a therapeutic use exemption for triamcinolone before the 2012 Tour de France, which he won, and the 2011 Tour and 2013 Giro d'Italia

AFP
London

Former British Cycling technical director **Shane Sutton** believes star rider Bradley Wiggins and the national governing body will be exonerated amid an ongoing investigation by United Kingdom Anti-Doping.

Wiggins has been in the spotlight since leaked medical data showed the five-time Olympic champion had been granted a therapeutic use exemption (TUE) by cycling authorities for the powerful steroid triamcinolone, which he was permitted to take before the 2012 Tour de France, which he won, and the 2011 Tour and 2013 Giro d'Italia.

UKAD is also looking into a package delivered to Team Sky at the end of a Criterium du Dauphine stage race won by Wiggins in June 2011. Team Sky — and Wiggins — deny wrongdoing and are cooperating with UKAD.

Dave Brailsford, the team principal, has also come under pressure for not revealing the contents of the package.

The Australian Sutton quit his British team post 100 days before this year's Rio Olympics amid allegations of discrimination.

"Our record at British Cycling speaks for itself, our record at (Team) Sky is brilliant, they've endorsed clean cycling from day



one," Sutton, a controversial figure, said yesterday.

"Knowing Sir Dave Brailsford

and the way he works, his work ethic, he's been the big pioneer for clean cycling and we built our

success off evidence-based programmes. The evidence will come out and I'm sure that they'll be

exonerated."

Sutton, who was at the Dauphine race, added: "It's not something uncommon for a coach or a logistics person to bring out a parcel.

"I don't know too much about the whole story but I've had a chat with UK Anti-Doping. Let the truth come out and move on."

Wiggins, 36, who in 2012 became the first Briton to win the Tour de France, plans to retire at the end of this year and is set to race on home soil for the final time at the London Six-Day event, starting tomorrow.

"I think we all need to get behind him again and support him because in my belief, this guy has done no wrong," said Sutton.

British Cycling announced this week that chief executive Ian Drake will stand down in April, a move he said was not linked to the recent controversies involving Wiggins and Team Sky.

"The timing's not great as far as the announcement's concerned but I wish him well," said Sutton. "He was a big supporter of mine. It's a sad day for British Cycling to see the end of Ian Drake's tenure."

Sutton said he would be happy to return to work for British Cycling if he is cleared by a separate inquiry into his conduct.

"I resigned when I did to take the heat off the team 100 days out from the Olympic Games," he said. "But I totally refute the claims."

Kangert wins Abu Dhabi Tour, Cavendish wins stage

Agencies
Abu Dhabi

Estonian rider Tanel Kangert (Astana Pro Team) won the 2016 Abu Dhabi Tour yesterday. Nicolas Roche (Team Sky) finished second with Diego Ulissi (Lampre-Merida) taking the final place on the podium. Vincenzo Nibali (Astana Pro Team) and Alberto Contador (Tinkoff) followed them in that order.

Yesterday's 143km final Stage 4, run on the Yas Marina circuit, was won by British rider Mark Cavendish (Team Dimension Data), the race's Official Ambassador, who won the Green Jersey of Points Classification.

"I must say the win was more difficult than it might look like because the corners were really tight.

"I was surprised they were so tight for car racing. It made the race special with the lights and

the dark. In the end I was pretty tired but just kept the wheels," Kangert said.

"I can't say there wasn't any pressure because there was, and I felt it. I was excited to race in the leader's jersey. It was my first time leading a professional race. I'm happy everything went well and I might be back soon to defend the title in February," the Astana Pro team member added.

Yesterday's stage winner, Cavendish, was all praise for the incredible atmosphere on the Yas Marina circuit: "I'm so happy to be the winner of the final stage.

"I missed the race last year because I was injured and I was really jealous of the boys racing, especially on this last day. It was very fast.

"My teammates controlled the group really well the whole day. I got an incredible lead out. Mark Renshaw was very calm going into the finale. I just had to jump."

SKIING

Pinturault edges out defending champ Hirscher



AFP
Sölden, Austria

France's **Alexis Pinturault** won yesterday's giant slalom at Soelden that kicked off the World Cup season, edging out Austria's Marcel Hirscher.

Pinturault, 25, had been the quickest in the morning's first run, laying the foundations for an eventual victory by seven tenths of a second from home star Hirscher, the reigning overall World Cup champion and champion in the discipline.

Felix Neureuther of Germany came third, 1.37 seconds behind Pinturault, whose winning overall time was 2 minutes 14.01 seconds. It was a 16th career win for Pinturault, one more than his illustrious compatriot Jean-Claude Killy.

"To win on such a difficult piste, at the start of the season, is obviously important," Pinturault said. "There is no strategy in alpine skiing, you just go all out. So on the second run, even if the visibility was not the best, my only solution was to give it everything."

Pinturault's rival earned him praise from showing Hirscher,

who has dominated the World Cup in recent years. "With what he showed today, he is now the favourite," Hirscher declared.

On his return from a knee injury at a venue where he has won four times before, American three-time giant slalom world champion Ted Ligety came in fifth.

"In the beginning, you never know where you are," Pinturault added. "You never know if you are skiing fast or not and just after Soelden, you can see where you are more or less. One thing that is easy in skiing is that there is never a strategy, you just have to push and push even harder for the second run."

Hirscher won the last two giant slalom globes along with the last five overall titles.

"I'm super happy because the pressure is definitely on my shoulders, especially at the first race of the season," Hirscher said. "If I am skiing good, everything is fine, but if I am skiing bad, it is never fun so I am super happy and a lot of pressure has gone away."

World Cup action next moves to Levi, Finland, with women's and men's slaloms scheduled for November 12 and 13.

Orica-BikeExchange buoyed by 2017 Tour route

Reuters
Melbourne

Australian pro cycling team **Orica-BikeExchange** believes Team Sky's stranglehold over the Tour de France may be loosened by the unconventional 2017 route and are relishing the prospect of a battle of "aggression" on the road.

The course unveiled this week, which starts in Dusseldorf on July 1 and ends in Paris on July 23, is peppered with a number of steep climbs occurring early in stages. Organisers hope it will reward attacking riders and prevent top teams like Sky and Movistar from locking down stages with tactical group riding.

Sky's meticulous organisation has propelled champion Chris Froome to the title in three of the last four races and prompted criticism that cycling's showpiece has become a dull spectacle.

But Orica-BikeExchange sport director Matt White is optimistic the new route will bring badly needed suspense back to the Tour. "I like it. Obviously, I'm thinking of it greedily for us and our particular team but it couldn't be much better," the 42-year-old Australian told Reuters in an interview. "The style of riding will have to be aggressive. It's



hard against some of the teams like Team Sky and Movistar who can control the race quite well. But there will be certain times and stages where we can get stuck into it."

Although all-rounder Froome and his formidable support train will have no fear of the climbs, White sees the two short individual time trials as opening the door slightly for the also-rans of recent years.

"Chris Froome is such a good time trialler," White said. "With less time trialling kilometres, it won't be won and lost in the

time trials. It'll be decided a little bit more out on the road."

Orica-BikeExchange, formerly Orica-GreenEdge, suffered an embarrassing blow mid-season with British rider Simon Yates handed a four-month ban for a positive test for his asthma medication.

The team claimed responsibility for an "administrative error", saying it had failed to apply for a Therapeutic Use Exemption (TUE), and the former track world champion was forced to sit out the Tour de France.

His twin brother Adam's impressive fourth place finish in the general classification raised the team's spirits, however, along with the rapid improvement of Esteban Chaves.

The 26-year-old Colombian finished second in the Giro d'Italia and third in the Vuelta, then capped off a fine year with victory in the Tour of Lombardy classic earlier this month, the last 'Monument' race of the season.

Chaves recently signed a contract extension until the end of 2019, giving White hope his five-year-old team can clinch a maiden podium at next year's Tour.

White will ponder his options for each of the Grand Tours after the full Giro route is released next week but already feels confident of consolidating the gains next year.

"The team has evolved over the last three-four years. We were really hunting for stagers (initially) and that's the only thing we could really do," the Spain-based director said.

"That's changed now that we've got such young talent who are capable of challenging. If we can repeat the results of this year, we've done well but I think the difference is that we're going in to the next year knowing we have the guys that can do it. Our challenge is to keep them there and try to improve on those results."

FIGURE SKATING

US star Wagner wins her second Skate America title

AFP
Chicago

Ashley Wagner, a three-time US champion and this year's world championship runner-up, captured her second Skate America women's crown yesterday after finishing second in the free skate.

Wagner took the title with 196.44 points to 121.59 for Mariah Bell, the 20-year-old American who won the free skate in only her second ISU Grand Prix event.

Bell set a personal best of 130.67 to win the free skate with Wagner next on 126.94 and Japanese teen Mai Mihara third on 123.53 to finish third overall on 189.28.

Wagner, who also won the short programme on Saturday, said she took mo-

mentum from her world second-place effort on home ice in Boston earlier this year into the event.

"That was huge," Wagner said. "The short program was one of my world class programs. That free program, I left it all on the table."

At 25, she is skating at an age when many are leaving the sport. "I'm not good at anything else. That's all I have," she said with a smile. "I love what I'm doing."

Wagner, who also won the 2012 Skate America crown, captured US titles in 2012, 2013 and 2015 and took a bronze medal in the team event at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.

Bell, eighth at last year's Skate America in her only prior Grand Prix start, was shocked to find herself on the podium. "I feel like I don't know what's going on," she said. "I skated a programme that I'm really proud of. To be



on the podium, I'm speechless."

It might be the shape of things to come for the US women with the next Winter Olympics in South Korea only 16 months away. "I'm starting to realise my own potential and believe in myself, which is really cool," Bell said. "I'm really excited for the future."

Mihara, a 17-year-old from Kobe making her Grand Prix debut, was second after the short program.

She denied the hosts the first women's podium sweep at Skate America since Michelle Kwan led the way 20 years ago after reigning US champion Gracie Gold, a hometown hero who was third in the short program, fell twice in the free skate and settled for fifth.

Gold, 21, has won two of the past three US titles and was fourth at the 2014 Winter Olympics as well as the past two World Championships.

Japanese 18-year-old Shoma Uno, who earlier this year became the first skater to land a quadruple flip in international competition, won the men's short program with 89.15 points.

Uno was last year's Skate America runnerup in his senior-level Grand Prix debut and third in last season's Grand Prix Final at Barcelona.

Reigning US champion Adam Rippon was second on 87.32 with 2015 American champion Jason Brown third on 85.75. Chicago hometown favourite Brown missed most of last season with a back injury and was unable to defend his crown earlier this year.

Pairs gold went to the young Canadian duo of Julianne Seguin and Charlie Bilodeau, ahead of Americans Haven Denney and Brandon Frazier with Russians Evgenia Tarasova and Vladimir Morozov third.

MOTOGP

Crutchlow wins in Australia after Marquez error

'Someone asked me last week what I thought about going to Phillip Island and I said I planned to come and win... It's nice to win one in the wet and the dry...'

AFP
Phillip Island, Australia

Cal Crutchlow seized on a blunder by new world champion Marc Marquez at Australia's Phillip Island yesterday to win only his second MotoGP.

The Briton, who turns 31 next week and was competing in his 103rd MotoGP, capitalised when Marquez made a mistake and crashed out on lap 10 while holding a big lead.

Crutchlow maintained a solid race pace on his LCR Honda to beat Italian great Valentino Rossi on his Movistar Yamaha by 4.218secs, with Spain's Maverick Vinales third on a Suzuki Ecstar.

The race turned dramatically when Marquez, who claimed his third premier-class world crown with victory in Japan last weekend, slid off his Repsol Honda into the gravel on Turn Four when in command.

Crutchlow swept to the front and held off the nine-time world champion Rossi until the chequered flag as Vinales and Andrea Dovizioso battled for third.

He became the first British winner of the Australian MotoGP.

Marquez acknowledged that he was to blame for the crash.

"It was completely my mistake. During the whole season I've been very careful on the braking points and this time I risked more so this crash has nothing to do with the Michelin tyres," he admitted.

It was Crutchlow's second victory in premier class after beating Rossi and Marquez in this season's Czech MotoGP in August.

"Someone asked me last week what I thought about going to Phillip Island and I said I planned to come and win... it's nice to win one in the wet and the dry because people only think you can ride in the rain when you win in it," Crutchlow said.

"I had to stay strong, I thought my pace in the race was good and better than in other years here," Crutchlow said.

"I was pleased to be able to take advantage when it came, and we look forward to Malaysia now."

Crutchlow had memories of his crash at the same corner two years when he trailed race leader Rossi on the last lap at Phillip Island.

"I didn't brake into that turn and took it quite easy. I was in the rhythm and so I continued with that and I rode comfortably to the finish," he said.

"I didn't want to make the same mistake but I knew I had to keep pushing if we lost the heat in the front tyre."

"I was quite confident I may have caught Marc but when he crashed I tried to keep the same pace and in the last 10-12 laps I didn't really push, I just made sure I kept the heat in the front tyre."

"I was confident I could have won with Marc in the race and we now look forward



British rider Cal Crutchlow celebrates his victory on the podium after the MotoGP race at the Australian Grand Prix at Phillip Island.



Movistar Yamaha MotoGP's Italian rider Valentino Rossi celebrates after the race.

to the last two races."

Rossi greatly improved his chances of finishing runner-up this season with his second placing.

He now leads teammate Jorge Lorenzo by 24 points heading into the final two races. Rossi has now finished 16 times on

Results & Standings

MOTOGP

1. Cal Crutchlow (GBR/Honda)
2. Valentino Rossi (ITA/Yamaha)
3. Maverick Vinales (ESP/Suzuki)
4. Andrea Dovizioso (ITA/Ducati)
5. Pol Espargaro (ESP/Yamaha)
6. Jorge Lorenzo (ESP/Yamaha)
7. Scott Redding (GBR/Ducati)
8. Bradley Smith (GBR/Yamaha)
9. Danilo Petrucci (ITA/Ducati)
10. Jack Miller (AUS/Honda)

World championship standings

1. Marc Marquez (ESP/Honda) 273 pts (champion).
2. Valentino Rossi (ITA/Yamaha) 216.
3. Jorge Lorenzo (ESP/Yamaha) 192.
4. Maverick Vinales (ESP/Suzuki) 181.
5. Dani Pedrosa (ESP/Honda) 155.
6. Cal Crutchlow (GBR/Honda) 141.
7. Andrea Dovizioso (ITA/Ducati) 137.
8. Pol Espargaro (ESP/Yamaha Tech3) 117.
9. Andrea Iannone (ITA/Ducati) 96

the podium in 20 trips to Australia amid his eight wins across all classes.

"This morning we discovered that we have good pace and step by step I came back and I try to reach Cal, but today he was too fast and too strong for me," Rossi said.

"Cal is always very fast around Phillip Island, he can interpret the track, and for me the second half of the race was difficult and I could not do it."

Pol Espargaro was fifth and Lorenzo sixth in Sunday's race, with two races left in the championship in Malaysia and Spain.

Swiss Thomas Luthi pipped Franco Morbidelli on the line to win an exciting Moto2 and pull to within 22 points of French championship leader Johann Zarco with two races left.

Newly-crowned world champion Brad Binder of South Africa stretched his lead in the world championship to 130 points after a dominant win in the Moto3 race.

Many of his rivals were among a total of 14 riders to crash out, with the race shortened to 10 laps under a red flag.

FORMULA 1

Verstappen shrugs off rule clarification

Reuters
Austin, Texas

Dutch driver Max Verstappen said he had no plans to change his style after Formula One's governing body outlawed a defensive manoeuvre that the Red Bull youngster has used to keep his rivals behind him.

International Automobile Federation (FIA) race director Charlie Whiting issued a clarification at the U.S. Grand Prix on Saturday to address moves that some of the drivers have questioned.

It reminded them that cars must not be driven "in a manner which could be potentially dangerous to other drivers" and barred "any abnormal change of direction".

"With this in mind... any change of direction under braking which results in another driver having to take evasive action will be considered abnormal and hence potentially dangerous to other drivers," the document added.

"Any such move will be reported to the stewards."

Verstappen, the sport's new young star and a race winner in Spain in May, has drawn criticism for abrupt moves while braking into a corner as speeding rivals tried to pass.

Triple world champion Lewis

Hamilton cut a chicane and went down an escape road at Suzuka when that happened while Ferrari's Kimi Raikkonen has had to take evasive action more than once.

"In the 10 years that I have been in Formula One, there's been the same rule that all us drivers understand and it is only newcomers who have come in and potentially not abided by that," Hamilton told reporters.

"It is about the respect that we have for one another, we're travelling at serious speeds. You commit to your defence but you don't do it (move again) while in braking. I think it's great that Charlie has understood the majority of drivers' opinions."

"The rules have to be very strict and clear because if they say you are allowed to move under braking, everyone would do it and we will all start a new way of driving which is dangerous," added the Briton.

Verstappen agreed the rules had to be obeyed but played down the impact on him.

"I don't think so," he added when asked whether he would have to change his style. "I think it's good to make it more clear what's allowed and what's not."

"So far it said in the rules that you could go to the inside under braking. Now it's not. So we'll see how that's going to affect racing."

ATHLETICS

85th AAA council meeting to be held in Doha from Oct. 26



AAA President Major General Dahlan al-Hamad (left) and IAAF President Sebastian Coe.



By Sports Reporter
Doha

Eight months after the 84th Asian Athletics Association Council meeting was held in Doha, Qatar's capital city will play host to the 85th edition of AAA's Council as well as to IAAF's Roadshow Workshop between October 26 and 28.

Asia's top athletics officials, representing more than 40 nations, will meet to discuss and make decisions upon crucial matters related not only to Asian Athletics but also to the future of the sport, following Sebastian Coe's recent proposal for governance structure reforms.

IAAF's president will personally explain and analyse his reform plans to the delegates on October 27 and 28, while the 26th of October is dedicated to the 85th AAA Council Meeting and to issues related to Asia.

"For the first time since I was elected AAA president, the vast majority of the Asian Athletics Federations have expressed their sincere interest in attending the Council Meeting. The changes proposed by Lord Sebastian Coe will deeply change the structure of the IAAF, therefore we need to

thoroughly examine all possible consequences, before the Special Congress in Monaco on December 3 approves the reforms," commented AAA President Major General Dahlan al-Hamad.

IAAF President Sebastian Coe claims the proposals have already been received well by Member Federations in America and Europe. "There are not many moments in our lives when we have a genuine opportunity to shape the future. The opportunity to put in place the building blocks for something that provides a solid and strong foundation upon which the next generation can confidently build," said Lord Coe in his message.

The proposal for reform of the IAAF's governance structure will be brought for consideration at a Special Congress to be held in Monaco on 3 December 2016. The delegates of Member Federations will vote on adopting two constitutions.

According to Lord Coe the reforms aim for: Redefining roles and responsibilities including empowering Member Federations and ensuring stronger Area representation, greater voice for athletes, better gender balance and independent anti-doping, integrity and disciplinary functions.

MOTO 2

Simeon happy about finishing eleventh but no luck for Simon

By Our Correspondent
Phillip Island, Australia

QMMF Racing Team rider Xavier Simeon battled his way to a hard-fought eleventh place in the Australian Grand Prix. The 27-year-old from Belgium started well from 20th place on the grid and held 15th place after one lap, then gained positions steadily until he broke into the Top Ten of the Moto2 field on the ninth lap. With a little more top speed on the main straight, he could have gained even more positions, but Simeon found it difficult to attack out of the slipstream. In the end, he beat current world champion Johann Zarco, who finished in 12th place, but crossed the line just fractions of a second behind Frenchman Xavi Vierege and German Marcel Schroetter.



QMMF rider Xavier Simeon (left) in action during the Moto2 race in Australia yesterday.

Teammate Julian Simon also started strong and was as high up as sixth after one lap. But as

the race went on, the Spaniard ran into difficulties with the front end of his bike and finally

crashed on lap ten, whilst still defending a place within the point rankings. Luckily, Simon walked away unhurt and is now determined to fight for a better result at the next round in Malaysia next weekend.

Xavier Simeon - 11th place

"I am very happy. I was able to break into the Top Ten and to fight for an eighth place. I had a very good feeling with the bike and I could ride very fast, so I enjoyed the race a lot. I had big fights with several other riders including Julian for some laps and it's a pity he had a crash. I also fought with Zarco, so for me it was a good race. The only thing missing was a little more speed at the end of the main straight. I could never attack out of the slipstream. I tried many times to pass Marcel Schroetter at turn four, but he was also braking very late, so it was not easy to

pass him. But anyway, we fought for the Top Ten and I am happy with that. Now we go to Malaysia with a lot of confidence. It's a track I like a lot, but where I suffered with the hot temperatures in the past. I need to adapt very well to be good in the race!"

Julian Simon - did not finish

"It was a difficult weekend due to the weather conditions, but I had a really good start in the race and I was going well on the opening laps. But as the race went on, I ran into problems and the bike got increasingly difficult to control. A few laps before I crashed, the front started to tuck away in the corners and eventually I couldn't avoid a fall. Luckily it was a crash without any physical consequences, which is the most important thing. Now we think ahead to the next race in Malaysia, where we will try to do well and get a good result!"

First edition of QTF & Al Majed Open tournament begins today

The first edition of QTF & Al Majed Open Tournament will begin today at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex. To conclude on November 02, 2016, the event will feature the participation of 170 players including 46 national teams' players to compete in different age groups including boys under 10, 12, 14, and 18 years in addition to Men's and Women's categories. The QTF Assistant Secretary General Tariq Zainal said, "We are happy with organising this tournament in cooperation with Al Majed Group as this cooperation reflects the spirit of responsibility at the two organisation and their com-



mitment to development of Tennis in the state of Qatar" Zainal wished the tournament to be a real beginning for a fruitful cooperation between the QTF and Al Majed Group and stressed that the support of the group to the Qatari Tennis underlines its belief in the positive contribution to the local community.

