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FOOTBALL

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OOREDOO STARS LEAGUE

Title chasers Al Sadd eye win against Umm Salal

'I hope everyone is ready and excited to resume the league. This tournament is very important to us'

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Sadd coach Felix Sanchez yesterday said his side was preparing for an 'important clash' against Umm Salal. The two sides meet today in a round four clash of the 2024-2025 Ooredoo Stars League at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

"An important match awaits us against Umm Salal. We seek to do our best in order to achieve victory and collect the three points," Sanchez, the former Qatar coach, said at a news conference yesterday.

"We have worked during the past period to correct the mistakes that occurred, focus will be our weapon in the match against Umm Salal. Like all league matches, this match will be difficult, Umm Salal were strong competitors in the previous three matches this season," he added.

"Given the circumstances, they are a difficult team to play against, we will see how the players will arrive after their return from the national team, and how we will be able to prepare for the match and which players will be available.

"I hope everyone is ready and excited to resume the league. This tournament is very important to us. I am confident that the players will be ready and will do their best to perform well and achieve victory," said Sanchez.

Al Sadd defender Paulo Otavio said yesterday: "The match



Al Sadd coach Felix Sanchez addresses a news conference in Doha yesterday. Al Sadd take on Umm Salal in round four of Ooredoo Stars League at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium today. Right: Umm Salal coach Carteron Patrice takes questions during a press conference.



against Umm Salal is difficult. We will see what happens, but we seek to win the three points. From my point of view, we must forget the previous three matches and this match will be like a new beginning for the league. We must start well against Umm Salal, and of course we have another match on Monday, but our focus now must be on Friday's match."

Umm Salal coach Carteron Patrice sounded wary of Al Sadd form in recent weeks.

"Al Sadd's matches with my

team always carry a lot of rivalry and enthusiasm between the two teams, and I think it will be very difficult, especially since Al Sadd's level in the last two matches in the league was great, after their first match in the league, where they were able to present their best," Patrice said at a news conference yesterday.

"We also know very well that Al Sadd, who won the league and Amir Cup, are one of the big candidates for the league title this season as well. Al Sadd are a strong

team, so we have to focus on ourselves more than focusing on the competitors, because we already know how strong they are," he added. "Umm Salal players enjoy great harmony among them and we benefited well from the QSL Cup matches, which were good, and we were able to win the last match thanks to the good spirit that the team has."

He expressed his happiness that all team players played and performed well. "My team is ready to meet Al Sadd in the fourth round

and all the team players have the determination and resolve to do their best. God willing, we will be more focused and determined, and I hope to achieve positive results and show a good face," Carteron said.

Umm Salal player Oussama Tannane said yesterday: "The matches between Umm Salal and Al Sadd always have special considerations and everyone can testify to their difficulty. The match against Al Sadd is not easy and everyone knows how difficult and

strong it is. We are ready and we strive to do our best and we will do our best to achieve a positive result, as Al Sadd are a strong team. We are also a good team and we have great confidence in ourselves, and thank God we have benefited from the QSL Cup matches and we will enter the match with great confidence and greater effort."

In the other matches today, Al Rayyan will meet Al Shahania at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium (6pm), while Al Gharafa take on Al Shamal at Al Bayt Stadium (6pm).

ANNOUNCEMENT

Arsenal manager Arteta signs new three-year deal

AFP
London

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta has signed a new long-term contract at the Emirates Stadium, the Premier League title chasers announced yesterday.

The Gunners said in a statement that the 42-year-old Spaniard, who has reportedly agreed a three-year deal, "has been a key figure in re-establishing us as a force back at the top of English and European football".

Arteta, who became Arsenal boss in late 2019, said he felt "extremely proud".

"I feel extremely lucky to work every single day with good people and the ambition we have here," he said.

"I feel very inspired, I feel challenged, I feel supported and I want to do much more than what we've already done together."

Arsenal co-chairman Josh Kroenke said he was delighted with the new deal.

"Mikel is a dynamic and passionate manager, who is relentless in the pursuit of excellence," he said.

"He has a deep understanding of Arsenal's values, and since joining us as head coach, he has taken the team to another level in an Arsenal way."

Arteta, who had been working



Manager Mikel Arteta signs a new contract at the Emirates Stadium, the home of English Premier League title chasers Arsenal. (@Arsenal)

as an assistant coach under Pep Guardiola at Manchester City, replaced compatriot Unai Emery as Arsenal boss in December 2019.

He won the FA Cup in his first season in charge - his first silverware as a manager.

Arsenal have finished as runners-up to City in the Premier League for the past two seasons.

Last term, they went agonisingly close to lifting the trophy for the first time since 2004 before being pipped by City on the last day of the season.

Arteta's men, who face north London rivals Tottenham on

Sunday, are currently fourth in the table after two wins and a draw.

They begin their Champions League campaign next week against Atalanta.

'Wonderful values'

Arteta, who played 150 times for Arsenal and captained the side, called for calm last month regarding his contract situation, insisting his focus had been on the transfer window.

"We are on it and we will take care of that in the right moment," said Arteta, who had previously been linked with Paris Saint-

Germain and Barcelona. "I don't think anybody has to panic. I am in the place where I want to be and am really happy.

"Hopefully the club thinks the same thing and the players I work with, who in my opinion are the most important ones."

Arsenal strengthened in the summer transfer window, bringing in a clutch of players including Raheem Sterling, Mikel Merino and Riccardo Calafiori.

There are still questions over whether they have enough firepower to overhaul champions City after their failure to sign a striker to compete with inconsistent Germany forward Kai Havertz.

But Arsenal sporting director Edu has no doubts about Arteta's ability to keep the club on course for sustained success.

"It's a very positive and proud moment for everyone at the club and an important part of what we're all working towards," Edu said.

"Mikel has shown his qualities since the very first day he joined us, not only as a football manager, but as a person with wonderful values.

"We have a strong belief in what we are doing and what we want to achieve together," Edu added.

"Mikel's new contract gives us stability and clear direction as we aim for new heights."

In-form Barcelona ready for revenge mission at Girona

Madrid: Hansi Flick's revitalised Barcelona have started the campaign with four consecutive La Liga wins that have got fans excited and on Sunday they will make the one-hour drive to neighbours Girona for a Catalan derby aiming to avenge last season's two defeats.

Girona secured a best-ever third-place finish last term and qualified for the Champions League for the first time but they started off the pace in the new campaign, drawing at Real Betis in their opener before losing 3-0 at Atletico Madrid.

However, they bounced back with solid wins against Osasuna and Sevilla and looked a lot like the exciting attacking side which took La Liga by storm in their historic campaign.

Backed by the wealth of their Abu Dhabi owners and only four years after being promoted to the top flight, Girona went toe-to-toe with Real Madrid in the title race last season. They also enjoyed beating Barca twice and contributed to their Catalan rivals' trophyless campaign that ended with the controversial firing of manager Xavi Hernandez, a Barca great as a player but who left on bad terms with the club in disarray. Struggling to comply with La Liga's strict Financial Fair Play rules, Barcelona had to let players like Ilkay Gundogan, Clement Lenglet and Vitor Roque go and could not re-sign Portugal's Joao Felix and Joao Cancelo. They made only one major addition in the transfer market - Spain attacking midfielder Dani



Barcelona's coach Hansi Flick during a training session. (@FCBarcelona)

Olmo from RB Leipzig. With all the talk surrounding Real Madrid, who added France captain Kylian Mbappe to an already star-studded squad that won a La Liga-Champions League double, Barca fans were not optimistic after the club unveiled ex-Bayern Munich and Germany coach Flick to help them re-establish themselves at home and in Europe.

However, Barca started the season with an attacking lineup on fire, headed by rejuvenated striker Robert Lewandowski, who is La Liga top scorer with four goals, teenage sensation Lamine Yamal and Olmo, who has shone after helping Spain win Euro 2024. Brazilian forward Raphinha has also finally become the difference maker Barca hoped for. Despite losing midfielder Fermin Lopez to a leg injury, Flick has all his other players back in one piece after international duty.

CRICKET

Head lets rip to fire Australia to win over England

The dashing opener smashes 59 to lay ground for 28-run win

Reuters
Southampton

Australia's Travis Head struck a remarkable 19-ball half-century including 30 off one over as his side beat England by 28 runs in the first match of their T20 series in Southampton on Wednesday night.

Head banged four sixes and eight fours in an explosive innings of 59 as Australia reached 86-0 in 5.5 overs.

Opener Matthew Short also struck two sixes in his knock of 41 but Australia, having reached the halfway point on 118-2, were pegged back by England's spinners to end on 179 all out.

Having gained the momentum after taking 10 Australian wickets for 93, England were unable to carry it into their innings and were never really in the hunt.

England, featuring T20 debutants Jordan Cox, Jacob Bethell and Jamie Overton and captained by Phil Salt in the absence of injured Jos Buttler, slumped to 52-4 as wickets fell at regular intervals on a chilly evening.

Sean Abbott took three wickets and Josh Hazlewood and Adam Zampa two apiece as England were all out for 151.

Head took a couple of overs to get his eye in but then let rip in spectacular fashion as Australia cashed in during the powerplay to leave England reeling.

Sam Curran came in for some fearsome punishment in the fifth over as Head began with successive fours before thumping a hat-trick of sixes and finishing it by carving another boundary.

Head was eventually out, top-edging Saqib Mahmood to the deep square leg boundary where Cox pounced the catch.



Australia's Travis Head plays a shot for six runs during the first Twenty20 International against England in Southampton on Wednesday. (AFP)

"I was trying to acclimatise to a wicket with pace, hitting good shots and Shorty got a cracking start," Head said. "A bit of a luck, but I've worked hard to play with a freer mindset."

Following Head's dismissal, Australian captain Mitchell Marsh was bowled by Adil Rashid for two but with Short also in attack mode, Australia looked poised for a huge score.

Short departed in the 11th over though, top-edging a slog sweep off the bowling of Liam Livingstone with Curran taking a well-judged catch, and the wheels began to fall off.

Livingstone had Marcus Stoinis and Tim David trapped lbw in successive deliveries as Australia slumped to 132-5.

Josh Inglis steadied the Aus-

tralia ship with 37 but England polished off the tail impressively, taking three wickets in three balls as Australia went from 172-6 to 172-9.

Off-spinner Livingstone ended with figures of three for 22 from three overs.

In reply, England lost Will Jacks (6) to Hazlewood in the second over and Cox (17) in the fifth over to a superb diving catch by David off the bowling of Xavier Bartlett.

Captain Salt made 20 before falling to another fine catch on the boundary, this time by Short.

Livingstone top-scored for England with 37 off 27 deliveries but when he was clean bowled by Hazlewood, any hope England had of chasing the total receded.

"Exciting watching Heady and Shorty, on par for above 200.

Tried our best to stuff it up," Australia captain Marsh said. "It was a 200 wicket, when Heady got going the conditions don't matter."

The second match in the T20 series takes place in Cardiff today.

BRIEF SCORES

Australia 179, 19.3 overs (T Head 59; L Livingstone 3-22) **v England 151, 19.2 overs** (S Abbott 3-28)

Toss: England

Result: Australia won by 28 runs

Series: Australia lead three-match series 1-0

REMAINING FIXTURES

(all times GMT)

Sep 13: England v Australia 2nd T20, Sophia Gardens, Cardiff (1730)

Sep 15: England v Australia 3rd T20, Old Trafford, Manchester (1330)

SPOTLIGHT

England's Livingstone 'feels like a kid again' after injury setbacks



England's Liam Livingstone attempting to play a wide free-hit ball during the first Twenty20 International against Australia in Southampton on Wednesday night. (AFP)

AFP
Southampton, United Kingdom

England all-rounder Liam Livingstone believes he's starting a "new career" after more than two years of injury woes.

The 31-year-old rushed back from ankle ligament damage to feature in England's 2022 T20 World Cup triumph, but then injured his knee a few weeks later in his lone Test appearance in Pakistan.

Problems with both form and fitness have led England to omit Livingstone from their current one-day international squad, but he remains involved in the ongoing three-match T20 series against Australia.

The spinner showed his all-round worth in Wednesday's series opener in Southampton, taking 3-22 and scoring a quickfire 37 off 27 balls, although his contributions were unable to prevent a 28-run loss.

"I feel like a little kid again, I feel like I'm starting a new career to be honest," Livingstone said.

"Life with niggles is not very fun."

"Mentally, more than anything, it feels really nice to be back playing cricket pain-free and I think, if I get back to my best, I feel like I'm an asset to any cricket team I play in."

"I'm back playing cricket with a smile on my face, that's when I play at my best. Fingers crossed it

stays that way for a while," he said after the match on Wednesday.

Livingstone earned his reputation in white-ball cricket as a 'finisher' whose aggressive batting style made him valuable at the end of matches.

But on Wednesday he batted in the top four for only the ninth time in 49 T20s, and enjoyed the additional responsibility.

"Series like these where you get an opportunity further up the order, it's a chance for me to stake my claim," he said.

"I guess winning games of T20 cricket for England may enhance my chances of getting back into the one-day team. But it is what it is, I'm 31, I'm not going to sit here and cry about not being picked."

"I want to play as much cricket for England as I possibly can. Unfortunately, I won't be playing in the ODIs but it's still not something I'm giving up on."

"I've had a difficult couple of years."

"My body has probably let me down a little bit, and maybe I haven't been up to scratch physically, with a couple of niggles here and there."

"I want that responsibility (to bat at number 4). I want to try to win games of cricket for England, and the higher up the order, the more chance you have of doing that."

"There's less people that can play that role (at No. 6) and sometimes you've got to take it on the chin... (but) this is a chance for me to stake my claim."

FOCUS

Greater Noida Test day four washed out

AFP
Greater Noida, India

Rain forced the fourth successive day of the only Test between Afghanistan and New Zealand to be called off yesterday, leaving the match in danger of being washed out without a ball being bowled.

With overnight downpours falling on an already saturated Greater Noida ground, umpires inspected before the scheduled start time of 9:30am (0400 GMT) and declared that no play would be possible.

The officials will inspect again at 8:00am (0230 GMT) on today's final day with the Test set to become only the eighth in history to be

abandoned without a ball being bowled - and the first for more than a quarter of a century.

The last time an entire Test was washed out was in December 1998 when New Zealand hosted India in Dunedin.

An abandoned 1970 Test match between Australia and England in Melbourne gave birth to one-day international cricket.

The two teams instead decided to play a 40-over contest on the originally scheduled fifth day once the weather had relented and it was later officially recognised as the first-ever ODI.

Afghanistan are unable to play international matches at home because of the security situation.

Afghanistan's adopted Greater Noida home

ground, near New Delhi, has seen incessant rain for two weeks.

Afghanistan have successfully played six Twenty20 and five one-day internationals at the Greater Noida venue since 2017.

But it is hosting Test cricket for the first time and has come under fire for lacking world-class facilities and having only basic drainage.

Hand-held electric fans had been used earlier in the week in a desperate attempt to dry the waterlogged turf.

This is only Afghanistan's 10th five-day match since they were granted Test status in 2017. Tim Southee's New Zealand will next travel after today's scheduled final day for two Tests in Sri Lanka before returning for three more against India.



Empty chairs are pictured as it rains at the start of day four of the Test between Afghanistan and New Zealand in Greater Noida yesterday. (AFP)

BOTTOMLINE

IOC election rules could affect prospects of presidential hopefuls

Reuters
Lausanne

International Olympic Committee presidential hopefuls, including World Athletics chief Sebastian Coe, face a set of election rules that could influence next year's vote for the new head of the world's biggest multi-sports organisation.

Britain's former Olympic champion Coe, 67, and Spanish IOC Vice-President Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr, the 64-year-old son of the late former IOC chief, are two of the potential candidates eyeing the top job in the Olympic body.

A letter sent this week by IOC ethics commission chief Ban Ki-moon to all members said the elected IOC president would have to be an IOC member throughout their entire term, while the age limit for IOC membership is 70 even for the top job, with only one possibility of a four-year extension.



IOC president Thomas Bach

The first term for an IOC president is eight years, which means that under current rules Coe and Samaranch, if elected, would exceed the age limit during their first years in office.

IOC members are elected either through their positions as heads of international federations and National Olympic Committees or as individual members.

Coe got onto the IOC in 2020 through his position as president of World Athletics.

"Pursuant the Olympic Charter the IOC President must be a member of the IOC at the time of the election and during the entire duration of their term as IOC President," the letter said.

The rules do not pose any immediate problem for either Coe or Samaranch to run for the position.

They are both under the age limit and current IOC members. The rules could, however, be an obstacle during a potential presidency should Coe, for example, lose his World Athletics post that is linked to his IOC membership.

IOC presidents, however, are able to push through rule changes quite easily, either through executive board decisions or charter changes. Neither Coe nor Samaranch immediately responded to a request for comment.

The new president will be elected by IOC members in March 2025 at a session in ancient Olympia, Greece, and will take over in June that year, Bach said, to allow a smooth transition.

RASHID RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN SQUAD FOR SOUTH AFRICA ONE-DAY SERIES

Kabul: Ace spinner **Rashid Khan** has been included in the Afghanistan squad for the three-match one-day series against South Africa this month, selectors said yesterday. The 25-year-old leg-spinner missed the one-off Test against New Zealand in India, which is likely to be washed out after four days of rain delays, because of medical advice to rest his back.

Rashid underwent back surgery in November after the ODI World Cup in India. The Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) said Rashid returns to the squad but opener Ibrahim Zadran will miss the series in Sharjah. "Afghanistan will have the services of its all-time greatest spinner Rashid but prolific opener Zadran was ruled out due to an ankle sprain in his left leg," the ACB said in a news release. Another spinner, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, is still recovering from a finger sprain, it said. Batters Darwish Rasooli and Abdul Malik, who played strongly in domestic one-day competi-



tions, have been included in Zadran's absence. Hashmatullah Shahidi will lead the squad. The matches will be played on September 18, 20 and 22 at Sharjah stadium, which will become the first ground in the world to host 250 ODIs.

Squad: Hashmatullah Shahidi (captain), Rahmat Shah, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Ikrām Alikhil, Abdul Malik, Riaz Hassan, Darwish Rasooli, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mohammad Nabi, Gulbadin Naib, Rashid Khan, Nangeyalia Kharote, Allah Mohammad Ghazanfar, Fazalhaq

Farooqi, Bilal Sami, Naveed Zadran, Fareed Ahmad.

Bangladesh pacer Shoriful misses India tour with injury
Bangladesh pacer Shoriful Islam will miss the two-Test series in India this month with a groin injury he suffered in Pakistan, the country's cricket board said yesterday. Bangladesh are on a high after winning both tests in Pakistan, where they registered their first Test series victory against their Asian rivals. Shoriful, 23, claimed three wickets in the first test in Rawalpindi but missed the second match with the injury.

Bangladesh Test squad: Najmul Hossain Shanto (captain), Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Zakir Hasan, Shadman Islam, Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan, Litton Das, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Tajjul Islam, Nayeem Hasan, Nahid Rana, Hasan Mahmud, Taskin Ahmed, S K Ahmed, Jaker Ali Anik

FORMULA ONE

Norris does not expect Piastri to gift him race wins

MCLAREN BOSS SAYS TEAM WILL GIVE NORRIS PRIORITY

Reuters
Baku

Lando Norris said he was not expecting teammate Oscar Piastri to gift him race wins despite McLaren's decision to put the Briton first in the Formula One title battle with Max Verstappen.

Team principal Andrea Stella told the BBC ahead of Sunday's Azerbaijan Grand Prix that McLaren wanted to support Norris "without too much compromise on our principles".

Norris told reporters in Baku that the reset was more likely for lower positions rather than if they were running first and second.

"He's still fighting for his own racing. He's still going out and doing his stuff. And it could be that there's no time this year that he needs to help me," said the Briton.

"It's more that I've got Oscar's help when needs be.

"If he's fought for a win and he's deserving of a win, then he deserves it.

"If he goes out and he's better than me, and performs better than me, and outqualifies me, and he wins a race, that's because he's done a better job."

Norris is second overall and 62 points behind Red Bull's triple world champion Verstappen with eight rounds remaining, plus three sprint races, while Piastri is fourth and 106 off the lead.

There are a maximum 232 points still to be won in the drivers' championship.

McLaren are chasing both titles and could go top in the con-



McLaren's Australian driver Oscar Piastri (left) and his British teammate Lando Norris pose ahead of the Azerbaijan Grand Prix in Baku yesterday. (AFP)

structors' standings in Baku, with the team only eight points behind once-dominant Red Bull.

Norris said it would hurt to miss out by a few points but he also did not want to be given a title.

"That's not how I want to win a championship. I want to win it by fighting against Max, by beating Max, beating my competitors and proving that I'm the best on track," he said. "And that's how I want to win."

BIGGER PICTURE

Piastri said separately that while team orders were "not that fun" he realised there was a bigger picture.

"Of course, being selfish, I would prefer to not have it, but I'm very aware that it's not just about me and I'm happy to play a supporting role at this point in the season," added the Australian.

"I think any earlier in the season, it would have been probably excessive but I think now it's an appropriate time to try and help the team win both championships.

"I think the main point is it's not purely just going to be me pulling over for Lando every single race because that's how none of us, including Lando, want to go racing."

Stella said the team's princi-

ples were that the team interest always comes first.

"Sportsmanship for us is important in the overall way we go racing. And then we want to be fair to both drivers," the Italian told the BBC.

He said McLaren wanted to avoid a repeat of the situation in Monza where Norris lined up on pole position with Piastri second but ultimately lost out to Ferrari's Charles Leclerc.

In that race, Piastri overtook Norris at the second chicane with Leclerc seizing second place from the Briton, who had to slow, before winning on strategy.

Verstappen finished only in sixth spot.

ANNOUNCEMENT

talabat, Asian Football Confederation join hands in new move



talabat, the leading on-demand food and Q-commerce app for everyday deliveries, has announced a new partnership with the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) - becoming an Official Regional Partner of the AFC club competitions.

Set to enhance the overall game day experience, talabat will be delivering engaging activations, prizes and more for football fans in Qatar, Jordan, Iraq and the UAE.

Francisco Miguel De Sousa, Managing Director of talabat in Qatar, expressed his delight, saying: "As a football enthusiast myself, I am proud that talabat is partnering with the Asian Football Confederation. This collaboration is about enhancing creativity and transforming the game-day experience for fans, all the while continuing to make life easier for our customers. I can't wait to see the incredible things we will achieve together this season."

Datuk Seri Windsor John, the

AFC General Secretary, said: "The AFC is delighted to partner with talabat in the Mena region, where Asian football is intrinsically embedded within its passionate fanbase. Both the AFC and talabat are committed towards driving innovation and excellence and we thank them for underlining their confidence in Asian football, particularly as the AFC's club competitions herald a new era of growth."

"We look forward to working in close partnership with talabat in bringing new and exciting experiences as we strive to deepen our connection with Asian football fans in the Mena region."

With the partnership set to run throughout the club competition season, fans in the UAE, Qatar, Jordan and Iraq can expect to enjoy dynamic experiences that enhance their passion for football.

Consumers can download talabat on the iOS App Store, Google Play Store and Huawei App Gallery.

Exhibition vs LIV players not meant to send message: McIlroy

New York: Rory McIlroy said his decision to join forces with world No. 1 Scottie Scheffler and take on LIV Golf League stars Bryson DeChambeau and Brooks Koepka was motivated by pleasing golf fans and not a way to help foster a deal that can bring the sport back together.

"I wouldn't say it's meant to send a message," McIlroy said yesterday about the exhibition match, which he agreed to be a part of last week, scheduled for December.

"It's more we wanted to do something that, I guess, all golf fans could get excited about. You've got the best player in the world (Scheffler).

"You've got two guys in Bryson and Brooks that have won majors in the last two years.

"You've got me in there, who - I haven't done what those guys have done the last couple years but I've definitely been, I feel, one of the best players in the world," he said.

"It's a way to show golf fans in the world that this is what could happen or these are the possibilities going forward," McIlroy continued.

"I've been saying this for a long time.

"I think golf and golf fans get to see us together more than four times a year."

The PGA Tour and Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, which finances LIV Golf, announced last week that they are planning to meet in New York about a potential investment in the hopes of repairing men's professional golf.

McIlroy explained yesterday: "I don't know much about the talks that are going on. I know that there is but that's not something that I'm a part of."

"I think we are all in the game of golf trying to look for a solution to all this and try to move forward."

"So we'll see, yeah. I know as much as you do at this point, and I'm sure news will start to trickle out here in the next few days," he added.

McIlroy, Tiger Woods and Adam Scott are part of the PGA Tour Enterprises transactional subcommittee, which has been negotiating with the PIF. McIlroy has expressed his frustration since the creation of LIV Golf, which began in 2021 and has splintered the sport.

'A deal can be worked out'
But despite the current state of men's golf, McIlroy remains hopeful that a deal can be worked out. "I think everyone in the game would love there to be one (a resolution)," McIlroy told *BBC Sport Northern Ireland*.

"A solution is hard to get to because there are different interests and people want different things.

"There's going to have to be compromise on both sides but, hopefully, they're the things they're talking about in those meetings."

"I'm hopeful and hopefully we'll be hearing some good news in the foreseeable future where things start to come back together."

COMMENT

Hamilton says his focus remains on Ferrari move

Reuters
Baku

Lewis Hamilton said star designer Adrian Newey's decision to join Aston Martin rather than Ferrari, the team the seven times Formula One world champion will be racing for next season, changed nothing for him.

Aston Martin announced on Tuesday that Newey, 65, would join next March as Managing Technical Partner and shareholder after a long stint with champions Red Bull. Ferrari had also been keen to sign him.

Asked by reporters at the Azerbaijan Grand Prix yesterday if he felt disappointed at having missed the chance to work with the sport's leading designer, the most successful driver replied "honestly, no".

"I feel like whilst I mentioned before that it would be good to work with Adrian I've been privileged to work with two championship winning teams that didn't have Adrian," he explained.



Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton in Baku yesterday. (Reuters)

"I think probably any team would have been happy to have had him, but at the end of the day he had to do what was best for him. It doesn't change anything for me or my will or my focus with the next move, so still 100% that there is lots we can do."

Cars designed by Newey have won 25 drivers' and constructors' championships for

Williams, McLaren and Red Bull. His 2023 Red Bull was the most dominant in the sport's history with 21 wins from 22 races.

Red Bull's championship leader Max Verstappen told reporters that while he didn't believe the team's recent struggles were linked with Newey's departure, he believed the designer was someone "everyone would like to work with".

"Adrian and I have a very good understanding. I sent him a message after the news came out, even though of course I knew that it was coming. So I'm happy for him, you know, it's a new challenge," the Dutch triple world champion said.

"I always said I would have loved him to stay, but at one point you can't overturn these things so then you're just excited for people seeking new challenges."

Asked whether he would consider a move to Aston Martin in the future, Verstappen said he was worried about other issues at the moment.

"That is something maybe for the future that I think about, but not now," he added.

TENNIS

Alcaraz's Spain and Great Britain post convincing wins in Davis Cup battle

AFP
Paris

Carlos Alcaraz returned to action after his shock US Open loss to help Spain get off to a winning start in the Davis Cup.

The 21-year-old French Open and Wimbledon winner was knocked out of the Flushing Meadows Grand Slam in the second round last month.

With time on his hands he made an impromptu trip to Monza to watch the Formula One Italian Grand Prix then was back on court in Valencia as Spain opened their group stage finals campaign against the Czech Republic.

Roberto Bautista Agut bagged Spain's first point with a 7-6 (7/1), 6-4 win over Jiri Lehecka.

Alcaraz then entered the fray, recovering from a 6-7 (3/7) first-set loss to Tomas Machac to wipe the floor in the second 6-1 before Machac retired.

Alcaraz followed that up by partnering Marcel Granollers to a tense 6-7 (2/7), 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) doubles win over Jakub Mensik and Adam Pavlasek to claim the Group B tie 3-0.

Earlier in China, the United States began their hunt for a record-extending 33rd Davis Cup title by sweeping aside Chile.

Bob Bryan's side belied their underdog status in terms of rankings to down the more fancied South Americans 3-0 in their group stage opener in Zhuhai.

The Americans have a day off now before today's next Group C clash with Slovakia, hurting after Tuesday's 3-0 loss to Germany, who take on Chile.

The USA are aiming to make it out of the group stage to progress to the finals for the first time since 2022.

Over in Manchester, Great Britain beat Finland 2-1 thanks to singles wins from Dan Evans and Billy Harris.

And in Bologna, defending

champions Italy, without newly minted US champion Jannik Sinner, secured a win over Brazil thanks largely to singles victories for Matteo Berrettini and Matteo Arnaldi.

The top two nations in each of the four groups in the round robin phase will qualify for the eight-team final in Malaga, Spain from November 19-24.

DAVIS CUP GROUP STAGE FINALS RESULTS

Group A
IN BOLOGNA, ITALY
Italy 2 Brazil 1

Matteo Berrettini (ITA) bt Joao Fonseca (BRA) 6-1, 7-6 (7/5)

Matteo Arnaldi (ITA) bt Thiago Monteiro (BRA) 7-5, 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/5)

Rafael Matos/Marcelo Melo (BRA) bt Simone Bolelli/Andrea Vavassori (ITA) 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (8/6), 7-5

Group B
IN VALENCIA, SPAIN
Czech Republic 0 Spain 3

Roberto Bautista Agut (ESP) bt Jiri Lehecka (CZE) 7-6 (7/1), 6-4
Carlos Alcaraz (ESP) bt Tomas Machac (CZE) 6-7 (3/7), 6-1 - retired
Carlos Alcaraz/Marcel Granollers (ESP) bt Jakub Mensik/Adam Pavlasek (CZE) 6-7 (2/7), 6-3, 7-6 (7/2)

Group C
IN ZHUHAI, CHINA
USA 3 Chile 0

Reilly Opelka (USA) bt Cristian Garin (CHI) 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (7/3)

Brandon Nakashima (USA) bt Alejandro Tabilo (CHI) 7-6 (7/5), 2-6, 7-6 (7/3)

Austin Krajicek/Rajeev Ram (USA) bt Tomas Barrios Vera/Matias Soto (CHI) 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/3)

Group D
IN MANCHESTER, ENGLAND
Finland 1 Britain 2
Dan Evans (ENG) bt Eero Vasa (FIN) 7-6 (7/3), 6-2
Billy Harris (ENG) bt Otto Virtanen (FIN) 6-4, 7-6 (7/4)

Harri Heliövaara/Otto Virtanen (FIN) bt Dan Evans/Neal Skupski (ENG) 7-6 (7/4), 7-5



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz and Marcel Granollers celebrate winning their doubles Davis Cup match against Czech Republic's Jakub Mensik and Adam Pavlasek in Valencia, Spain. (Reuters)

DIAMOND LEAGUE

'Energised' Tebogo looking to close season with bang

AFP

Brussels, Belgium

Olympic 200m champion Letsile Tebogo says he feels "energised" as he seeks to bring the curtain down on his breakthrough season with victory in the Diamond League finals in Brussels tomorrow.

The Botswana sprinter bounced back from the death of his mother in May to claim a stunning gold at the Paris Games ahead of, amongst others, Covid-hit favourite Noah Lyles. He won in an African record of 19.46 seconds, a time that took him to fifth on the all-time list. Tebogo also became the first African to win the Olympic 200 metres.

He had announced himself on the global stage with a 100m silver and 200m bronze at the 2023 world championships in Budapest. Since the Olympics in the French capital, the 21-year-old has won the 200m at Diamond League events in Lausanne, Silesia, Rome and Zurich, the latter in an outstanding 19.55sec in wet and cold conditions.

Tebogo insisted at a pre-finals press conference yesterday that he was just one of a raft of new faces jostling for prominence in building a new post-USain Bolt era. "People always have their own opinions about how you look at one particular person," Tebogo said. "For me, I believe there's a new generation coming up. I believe we've passed that (Bolt) era but we didn't yet surpass his goals in track and field."



FROM LEFT: Former Belgian athlete Kim Gevaert, Sweden's pole vaulter Armand Mondo Duplantis, Netherlands' sprinter Femke Bol and Botswana's sprinter Letsile Tebogo pose for a picture on the eve of the Diamond League finals meeting in Brussels. (AFP)

Bolt's former Jamaican teammate Yohan Blake holds the stadium record of 19.26sec in Brussels, set in 2011, something Tebogo said could be in danger. "Looking at what I did in Zurich, no one thought that

19.5 was possible looking at the weather conditions," he said. "I believe looking at the competition also, the stadium record is possible, but I don't want to put myself under that pressure of chasing that sta-

dium record. If it comes, then it comes. All I can say is I feel fresh after all the runs I've been through and feel more energised than anything else."

The 200m showdown at the two-day

finals, which draw a close to the elite 14-meet Diamond League circuit, also features Liberia's Joseph Fahnbulleh, alongside a trio of strong Americans in Kenny Bednarek, Erriyon Knighton and Fred Kerley. "It's two Africans against the rest of the world," maintained Tebogo, who also finished sixth in the 100m final in Paris in 9.86sec. "I believe it's going to be a good race! It's a good thing to end the season with that winning streak, with that Olympic gold and Diamond League trophy."

Tebogo returned to a rapturous welcome in Gaborone after his Paris gold, Botswana President Mokgweetsi Masisi greeting the sprinter and other Olympic athletes after he had declared an impromptu half-day holiday. "It was a proud moment seeing the thousands of people waiting for me at the stadium," he said.

"It was amazing for me," added the sprinter whose mother Seratiwa died suddenly in May whilst Tebogo was away in the United States.

Having also been part of Botswana's 4x400m relay squad that won a thrilling silver in Paris, Tebogo acknowledged that a proper tilt as a one-lap runner is on the horizon. "I have to get the job done in the 100m and then move up to the 400," Tebogo said, adding that he might take one season focused on the 400m after the 2025 world championships in Tokyo.

"My favourite event is the 200m because it's not as technical as the 100m - there's a lot of work and focus on it and you cannot correct anything along the way. With the 200m, you can fix mistakes and push your body to its maximum limits."

FOOTBALL

Ten Hag hits back at Ronaldo criticism over his ambition

'He's far away playing in Saudi, far from Manchester'

AFP

London

Erik ten Hag yesterday brushed aside Cristiano Ronaldo's criticism about his ambition at struggling Manchester United, saying the Portugal star is "far from Manchester".

Ronaldo's second spell at United ended in a high-profile break-up in November 2022 after he made stinging comments about his Dutch boss. The 39-year-old Al Nassr player again hit out at Ten Hag this week, saying his attitude was too negative for a club of the stature of United.

Ronaldo told the *Rio Ferdinand Presents* podcast: "Manchester United coach, you cannot say that you're not going to fight to win the (Premier) League or Champions League. You have to be, to mentally say, 'Listen, maybe we don't have that potential but I cannot say that. We're going to try! You have to try!'"

He also said the club need to "rebuild everything" and that it "will be difficult" for them to challenge for the biggest trophies. Ferdinand was a teammate of Ronaldo's during his trophy-laden first spell at United, from 2003 to 2009.

Ten Hag has said he is "quite confident" of claiming more silverware this campaign after lifting the League Cup and FA Cup over the past two seasons. But he said in July his team are a "long way away" from being ready to win the Premier League, with United not crowned champions of England since Alex Ferguson's final season in charge in 2013.

When Ronaldo's comments about his mentality were put to him at a yesterday's press conference, Ten Hag said: "He said that Manchester United can't win the Premier League. No, he said this if you read the article very well. So, he's far away in Saudi, far from Manchester. Everyone is entitled to have an opinion. It's OK."

Ronaldo's interview came after an international break that immediately followed United's humiliating 3-0 loss at home to bitter rivals Liverpool. But Ten Hag said he did not let it affect him.

"It doesn't impact me," he insisted. "I know in the process where we are, what we have to do, where we are going. I have said before we



are still in a transition period. We have to integrate a lot of young players also in the team. We are still dealing with injuries, we have to bring the injuries back in the team. Before anyone thinks about excuses, no, we have to win every game. I know that, the team knows this and it doesn't matter who is available. We will focus on every game and have in every game the mindset that we have to win."

United upset Manchester City in the FA Cup final in May but they endured their worst Premier League campaign last term, finishing eighth. The 20-time English champions, who travel to Southampton tomorrow, have lost two of their opening three league matches this season. Luke Shaw and Rasmus Hojlund remain sidelined but new signing Manuel Ugarte could make his debut after playing for Uruguay in midweek.

Despite the poor results, the manager says that the team is going in the right direction.

"Of course, when you see the scores no-one is happy and also the players have a very good sense of the quality of the process," Ten Hag said. "Also, when you analyse the games, all the games so far, we are in a good direction. When you are in a transition period and have to build the team we have to improve and step up. We will see where we are in May next year, it's very early in the season."

The manager said that neither forward Hojlund or defender Shaw were available for the trip to Southampton. Both players have yet to make an appearance this season through injury, but are progressing well. Midfielder Manuel Ugarte, however, could make his debut after signing from Paris St Germain on deadline day, despite only returning from international duty with Uruguay yesterday. United are 14th in the standings on three points while Southampton are second from bottom and yet to win a point this season.

Long-awaited case on Man City charges to start on Monday: Report

Manchester: A long-awaited hearing into 115 charges levelled against Manchester City is set to begin on Monday with potentially huge ramifications for the Premier League champions.

Sky Sports reported yesterday that the independent commission in charge of the case will begin next week. City stand accused of 80 breaches of financial rules between 2009 and 2018, plus a further 35 of failing to co-operate with a Premier League investigation. Since a 2008 takeover from Sheikh Mansour, a member of the United Arab Emirates royal family, City have been transformed into the dominant force in English football. They have won eight of the last 13 Premier League titles, including a record four consecutive league crowns in the past four seasons.

City also lifted the Champions League for the first time in 2023. Those achievements have been clouded in controversy, with opposing fans often making reference to the charges City face. However, the club have always protested their innocence and vowed to clear their name.

"Of course, it's frustrating. I think the reference is always frustrating," said City chairman

Khaldoon al-Mubarak earlier this year. "I can feel, of course, for our fan base, for everyone associated with the club, to have these charges constantly referenced."

The Premier League brought the charges in February 2023 but there has been a lengthy wait for the case to proceed before an independent commission. If found guilty on some or all of the charges, City face a severe points deduction and possibly even expulsion from the Premier League.

Everton and Nottingham Forest suffered points deductions last season for breaches of the league's profit and sustainability rules. City stand accused of failing to provide accurate financial information between 2009 and 2018, including revenue from sponsors and salary details of managers and players.

Other charges relate to breaches of both UEFA and the Premier League's financial sustainability regulations. The hearing is set to last at least two months, with a decision not expected until 2025. Even if City are found guilty of some or all of the charges by the commission, the club would likely appeal that decision, which would further delay the imposition of any sanctions.

SPOTLIGHT

Everton say 'work to be done' on Textor takeover

AFP

London

Struggling Everton yesterday played down prospective new owner John Textor's comments about being close to a takeover of the Premier League club, saying "there remains work to be done".

In an interview on Wednesday, the American businessman, who has a 45 percent share in top-flight rivals Crystal Palace, which he has to offload before he can buy Everton, said the deadline to complete a deal with Toffees owner Farhad Moshiri was November 30 but he felt an agreement could be done before then. Everton, bottom of the Premier League after three defeats in their first three games, have distanced themselves from Textor's assessment of the situation.

"The club is aware of the comments made by John Textor in relation to a potential purchase of the club," said an Everton statement.

"While positive conversations and progress continues to be made with Mr Textor to formalise any deal with him there remains some work to be done to complete the transaction. Accordingly, the comments made by Mr Textor merely represent his personal view on club matters."

Textor said the opportunity to become the new owner of Everton was like being asked if he would like to become the president of the United States. Textor, the fifth bidder to have been granted a period of exclusivity by Moshiri, added he had no plans to sack manager Sean Dyche. Dyche, who is in the final year of his contract with the Merseyside club, brushed aside concerns about his future.

Tottenham's Bentancur charged with misconduct over remarks about teammate Son

London: Tottenham midfielder Rodrigo Bentancur was charged by the Football Association over an alleged misconduct breach for a remark made on Uruguayan TV about teammate Son Heung-min. The Uruguay international had been asked in June by the host of the Canal 10 show for a Spurs player's shirt, to which he replied: "Sonny's? It could be Sonny's cousin too as they all look the same."

British anti-discrimination charity Kick It Out said it had received a "significant number" of complaints related to the comment. Bentancur apologised to the South Korea international and Spurs skip-



per, who said his teammate had "made a mistake".

A statement from the FA said Bentancur had been charged with an alleged breach of its rules in relation to a media interview.

"It's alleged that the Tottenham midfielder has breached FA Rule E3.1 as he acted in an improper manner and/or used abusive and/or insulting words and/or brought the game into disrepute," the statement said.

"It's further alleged that this constitutes an 'aggravated breach' which is defined in FA Rule E3.2, as it included a reference, whether express or implied, to nationality and/or race and/or ethnic origin."

Bentancur has until September 19 to provide a response to the charge. Former Manchester United striker Edinson Cavani was banned for three games and fined £100,000 (\$130,000) in 2020 for using

the Spanish term "negrito" (small black person) in a social media post.

KUWAIT FEDERATION SUSPENDS BOSSES OVER IRAQ MATCH CHAOS

Kuwait's football federation has suspended one of its top bosses and its PR chief over failings that left fans in sweltering temperatures for hours during a World Cup qualifier against Iraq.

In a statement late Wednesday, the Kuwait Football Association expressed its "deep regret" for ticketing and other logistical problems that marred the game at the 60,000-capacity Jaber Al-Ahmad

International Stadium on Tuesday.

It also said it would launch a probe into the shortcomings, which resulted in fans fainting in temperatures of over 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) as they pleaded with staff for water, with videos of the incidents shared on social media. Ticketing problems also meant some fans without tickets were allowed in, while others who had purchased tickets were refused entry. The federation said it had suspended its secretary-general, Salah al-Qanal, and public relations boss Mohamed Bou Abbas over the "unacceptable events".