

The Peninsula
SPORT

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Al Duhail still on top as Al Sadd,
Al Rayyan continue hunt for title

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: QNB Stars League (QSL) giants Al Sadd and Al Rayyan continued to chase leaders Al Duhail as another exciting week of action came to a close on Saturday.

At the end of Week 15, Al Duhail are cruising at the top with 39 points following their 12th win of the season on Friday. The Red Knights faced no problems in out-playing Al Ahli 4-0, with Yousef Msakny scoring three goals and assisting for the other netted by Yousef El Arabi.

El Arabi took his tally to 20 goals on top of the scoring chart and is well poised to bag the coveted award for the second successive season.

It was the first round of action after the close of January transfer window, where many clubs reinforced their squads ahead of the second

and tough phase of the season.

There was only one change in the standings as Qatar SC slipped from ninth to 10th and Al Arabi moved up by one position.

Despite facing an early scare, Al Sadd fought back to overcome Qatar SC 3-1 in the final match of the week as Xavi Hernandez's men recorded their 12th win of the season.

The Barcelona legend, Xavi, Hassan Ahmed and Hamed Ismail scored for The Wolves as they lead the chasing pack behind Al Duhail with 37 points.

Al Rayyan who are trailing by just two points behind Al Sadd, beat Al Markhiya 3-1, with Sebastian Soria, Abderrazak Hamdallah and Rodrigo Tabata finding the mark.

Al Markhiya's goal came through Mohamed Salah. The Oryxes stayed rooted to

QNB STARS LEAGUE STANDINGS										
Rank/Club	Matches	Wins	Losses	Draws	GF	GA	GD	Points		
1: Al Duhail	15	12	0	3	54	19	35	39		
2: Al Sadd	15	12	2	1	43	16	27	37		
3: Al Rayyan	15	11	2	2	40	23	17	35		
4: Al Saliya	15	7	5	3	32	27	5	24		
5: Umm Salal	15	5	4	6	23	22	1	21		
6: Al Gharafa	15	5	5	5	24	25	-1	20		
7: Al Ahli	15	4	7	4	17	26	-9	16		
8: Al Khor	15	4	9	2	17	28	-11	14		
9: Al Arabi	15	2	7	6	17	27	-10	12		
10: Qatar SC	15	3	9	3	15	34	-19	12		
11: Al Kharaitiyat	15	2	9	4	19	37	-18	10		
12: Al Markhiya	15	1	9	5	10	27	-17	8		

the bottom on eight points.

Al Saliya and Umm Salal, the fourth and fifth-placed sides, both dropped points.

Al Ahli, who did well in holding Umm Salal and Al Khor in the previous rounds, could not find their footing against a marauding Al Duhail.

Al Saliya again dropped points, this time being held

2-2 by Al Kharaitiyat who punched way above their weight under new coach Yasser Sebae, who replaced Tunisian Ahmad Al Ajlani following their Week 14 defeat at the hands of Al Khor.

Moroccan striker Rachid Tiberkanine scored Al Kharaitiyat's both goals, while that of Al Saliya came from Wagner Ribeiro and

Majdi Siddiq. The Peregrines would be ruing the two points they lost as they bid to finish the competition among the top four, while The Thunders received a morale booster when their confidence was at a low ebb, being in the 11th position and took their points to 10.

Al Arabi did well in drawing goalless with fifth-placed Umm Salal, taking their points to 12 and 21 respectively. The hard-earned point helped The Dream Team move to ninth from 10th in the table.

Al Gharafa prevailed over Al Khor 2-1 to close the gap with Umm Salal from three points to one. Wesley Sneijder and Muad Hassan found the target for The Cheetahs, who are on 20 points. Al Khor stayed on 14.

The week witnessed 19 goals being scored compared to 21 in the previous round.

QSL: Stars
of the week

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The QNB Stars League's (QSL) Week 15 saw four matches where as many goals were scored and two drawn encounters. It also witnessed many star performances. Here is a look at the highlights.

YOUSSEF MSAKNY (AL DUHAIL)

Youssef Msakny had a field day against Al Ahli, playing the captain's role to perfection. The Tunisian attacking midfielder had a hand in all four of their goals. He scored three and gave assist for the other, netted by Moroccan striker Yousef El Arabi, the QSL's top scorer with 20 goals. Msakny took his tally to 14 goals and is second in the list.

MASOUD ZERAEI (AL ARABI)

Masoud Zeraei made many saves while keeping the Al Arabi goal in tact against formidable Umm Salal, who were placed fifth in the table. His efforts helped The Dream Team earn a valuable point as they are staring at relegation. Zeraei, who is a committed Al Arabi player, held firm against an Umm Salal attack consisting of Yannick Sagbo, Mahmoud Mawas and Oussama Darraji.

WESLEY SNEIJDER (AL GHARAF)

Wesley Sneijder scored his second goal in Qatar when he gave Al Gharafa the lead during their 2-1 victory over Al Khor. The Dutch attacking midfielder converted a free-kick with clinical precision and played an influential role in The Cheetahs' midfield as they held off The Knights to register their fifth victory, and third in the second phase of league competition.

ABDERRAZAK HAMDALLAH (AL RAYYAN)

Star Moroccan forward Abderrazak Hamdallah had a stellar role to play as Al Rayyan put it across Al Markhiya 3-1 to cement their third position in the standings with 35 points. Hamdallah not only scored a goal, but also gave assists to Sebastian Soria and Rodrigo Tabata who found The Lions' other goals. Hamdallah's tally in the top scorers' list stands at 12.

RACHID TIBERKANINE (AL KHARAITIYAT)

Moroccan striker Rachid Tiberkanine scored Al Kharaitiyat's both goals in their 2-2 creditable draw with fourth-placed Al Saliya. It was a much-needed point for The Thunders who were 11th and were playing their first match under new coach Yasser Sebae, who replaced Tunisian Ahmad Al Ajlani. It was Tiberkanine's 10th goal in this season's league campaign.

XAVI HERNANDEZ (AL SADD)

Xavi Hernandez led from the front by playing a key role in Al Sadd's 3-1 victory over a fighting Qatar SC. The Spanish World Cup and European Championship winner once again held the The Wolves' midfield together as they kept pace with leaders Al Duhail, with only two points separating them. Most importantly, Al Sadd did not slip in the title race. It was Xavi's sixth goal this season.

Pique's late strike keeps Barca unbeaten

REUTERS

BARCELONA: Gerard Pique headed home a late equaliser for Barcelona against Catalan rivals Espanyol to earn his side a 1-1 draw in Cornellà and maintain their unbeaten La Liga record yesterday.

The defender, whistled throughout after making provocative comments which upset Espanyol fans after Barcelona knocked their rivals out of the King's Cup in January, buried Lionel Messi's free kick.

Ernesto Valverde had started the Argentine on the bench as he rotated his side but threw Messi on in the second half as Barcelona struggled to break down a stubborn Espanyol on a waterlogged pitch in driving rain.

Gerard Moreno headed home Sergio Garcia's inch-perfect cross in the 66th minute to give Espanyol hope of repeating their King's Cup first-leg win over Barcelona but Pique had the final say to move his side provisionally 12 points clear at the top of the table.



Barcelona's Uruguayan forward Luis Suarez (left) vies for the ball with Espanyol's Brazilian defender Naldo during their Spanish League match played at the RCDE Stadium in Cornellà de Llobregat yesterday.

Golf: India's Sharma fires 10 birdies to clinch Malaysia title

AFP

KUALA LUMPUR: India's Shubhankar Sharma fired 10 birdies to stun crowds and secure a two-shot win at the \$3 million Maybank Championship in Malaysia yesterday.

It is the second Asian Tour and European Tour victory for the 21-year-old, who pocketed \$500,000 and triumphed with a 10-under-par 62 on the final day of the tournament just two months after clinching the Joburg Open.

Speaking to reporters after the win, the world number 193 said 10 was his lucky number.

"It's always tough to make more

birdies when you're trailing the leaders, but I was calm and fantastic, so it was great," he said.

"I've had a few 10-under pars, the first one I shot was in Manila two years back. And then I shot 10-under again in Joburg to win, so that number is lucky for me."

In sweltering conditions, Sharma came into the final round tied-19th, needing to make up four shots to catch overnight leaders Spaniard Jorge Campillo and South African Dylan Frittelli.

His road to victory began with an incredible four consecutive birdies, which included a 15-foot putt at the seventh hole.

Another birdie on the ninth was followed with an impressive birdie on the 11th, before he dropped in a further four to finish on a high.

"I didn't start well, but made the four birdies," he said.

"Even on the back nine, I just kept playing well. It's still sinking in, really happy with the way I played."

Runner-up Jorge Campillo meanwhile carded 68 for an overall 19-under-par 269.

His compatriot Pablo Larrazabal was tied-third with New Zealander Ryan Fox. Frittelli finished tied-fifth, along with Italy's Nino Bertasio, India's Khalin Joshi and Japanese duo Ryo Ishikawa and Hideto Tanihara.

MAYBANK CHAMPIONSHIP SCORES

Final round scores of the Maybank Championship Malaysia (par 72):

267 - Shubhankar Sharma (IND) 70-69-66-62
269 - Jorge Campillo (ESP) 69-66-66-68
270 - Pablo Larrazabal (ESP) 70-70-64-66, Ryan Fox (NZL) 68-68-68-66
272 - Nino Bertasio (ITA) 68-65-70-69, Ryo Ishikawa (JPN) 74-66-63-69, Hideto Tanihara (JPN) 71-64-68-69, Khalin Joshi (IND) 67-70-65-70, Dylan Frittelli (RSA) 69-66-66-71
273 - Berry Henson (USA) 69-68-65-71
274 - Matthias Pavon (FRA) 70-67-70-67, Joost Luiten (NED) 72-68-66-68, Maximilian Kiefer (GER) 69-66-71-68, Romain Watfel (FRA) 67-73-65-69, Lee Westwood (ENG) 72-62-70-70, Paul Peterson (USA) 69-70-65-65-70



Shubhankar Sharma of India hits a bunker shot on the 18th during the final round of the 2018 Maybank Malaysia Golf Championship at Sajjana Golf and Country Club outside Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Right: Sharma poses with the trophy after winning the event.

Strong finish gives Fowler lead at Phoenix Open

AFP

LOS ANGELES: Rickie Fowler birdied his last three holes to seize a one-stroke lead over world number two Jon Rahm and two others yesterday at the US PGA Tour Phoenix Open.

Fowler, who shared the overnight lead with Bryson DeChambeau rolled a nine-foot birdie putt into the heart of the cup at the 18th hole of TPC Scottsdale to move atop the jammed leaderboard, firing a four-under 67 for 14-under 199.

Rahm, chasing Dustin Johnson's world number one ranking, carded a six-under par 65 and was joined on 200 by DeChambeau, who signed for a 68 and Chez Reavie, who carded a 67.

Five-time major winner Phil Mickelson carded a 66 to head a group on 201. He was tied with reigning Rookie of the Year Xander Schauffele (66) and Daniel Berger (68).

Six more players were just three off the pace on 202.

World number seven Fowler, whose history of strong showings in Phoenix include a runner-up finish in 2010 and a playoff loss to Hideki Matsuyama in 2016, was rewarded for his patience with a sizzling finish to the day.

"It was a grind," said Fowler, who was one-over for the day after a bogey at the fourth before his first birdie of the day at the eighth -- where he was in a fairway bunker.

"Just a little off in certain areas. (I) just tried to kind of piece things together," Fowler said. "We took advantage of the last few holes, but that is the biggest scoring opportunity on the golf course."

DeChambeau, seeking his second tour victory, was 14-under after three straight birdies at 13, 14, and 15, but he gave a stroke back at 17 where he was in the water off the tee.

Germany win Davis Cup tie against Australia

AFP

BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA: German number one Alexander Zverev beat Nick Kyrgios in straight sets to give his country a 3-1 win over Australia in their Davis Cup World Group tie in Brisbane yesterday.

Zverev produced some superb tennis to down Kyrgios 6-2, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 in one hour, 48 minutes and put Germany into a quarter-final against either Spain or Great Britain.

Zverev served beautifully throughout, only facing two break points in the match, both at the end of the second set and both of which he saved.

He also returned well, getting many of Kyrgios's thunderbolts back in play and then winning the battle from the back of the court.

Kyrgios went into the match full of expectation after an impressive win over Jan-Lennard Struff in Friday's opening singles.

Zverev, on the other hand, had looked out of touch on Friday and was pushed for almost four hours before seeing off 18-year-old Alex de Minaur in five sets.

But following the Germans' win in the doubles on Saturday to give them a 2-1 lead, all the pressure was on Kyrgios, who had to win to keep the tie alive.

The mercurial Australian opened brilliantly, holding his serve to love much to the delight of the boisterous home crowd.

But that was almost as good as it got for his next three service games to surrender the opening set in just 23 minutes.

Kyrgios appeared troubled by an elbow

problem in the first set and it became more noticeable in the second, the Australian often shaking his right arm between points.

He served better in the second set, firing down eight aces, but at 4-3 he had a medical timeout for treatment on his arm.

The Australian continued to serve well and had two set points on Zverev's serve at 6-5, but the German saved both then played a superb tiebreak to take a stranglehold on the rubber.

Once Zverev broke to go ahead 3-1 the result was never really in doubt and at 2-5, Kyrgios was broken again to give Germany the tie.

Kyrgios said he felt a problem with his elbow after Friday's match.

"It obviously affected me a lot," a downcast Kyrgios said.



Alexander Zverev of Germany (second left) and his team celebrate his victory over Nick Kyrgios of Australia following their Davis Cup World Group tennis match at the Pat Rafter Arena in Brisbane, yesterday.



Kvitova champion in St Petersburg

REUTERS

ST PETERSBURG: Double Wimbledon winner Petra Kvitová (pictured) captured the St Petersburg Ladies Trophy on Sunday for her first title of the year, beating defending champion Kristina Mladenovic 6-1 6-2 in the final.

Kvitová, who entered the tournament as a wild card, was dominant in the opening exchanges and hit 16 winners in taking the first set.

he 27-year-old broke her French opponent's serve twice more in the second set to seal the match in just over an hour.

"This was a special tournament for me," Kvitová said in her on-court interview.

"All week, I played unbelievable matches and I really had to fight to make the final. It is not easy at the beginning of the year. I had to focus hard for the win."

The Czech left-hander gave few opportunities on her serve to Mladenovic, firing nine aces and saving all three break points faced in front of a buoyant Sibur Arena crowd.

"Coming into this week, there was a lot of pressure and I don't think many people expected me to show up in the finals," the 24-year-old Mladenovic said in her runner-up speech.

"I fought very hard every single match to make it back here but Petra had an amazing week." The victory meant Kvitová maintained her streak of winning at least one WTA title since 2011 and now moves back up to world number 21, while German semi-finalist Julia Goerges will make her top-10 debut in today's rankings.

Meanwhile, Hungary's Tímea Babos triumphed over Katerina Kozlova of Ukraine to win the Taiwan Open Sunday, her second title of 2018 after claiming the doubles trophy in Melbourne last month.

The Hungarian fourth seed carried over the momentum from the Australian Open to win in straight sets, 7-5, 6-1.

It was her third WTA singles title after winning the Abierto GNP Seguros in Monterrey in 2012 and the Hungarian Ladies Open in Budapest last year. Kozlova was making her debut at a WTA final. She stayed close in the first set but conceded an easy victory in the second. The Ukrainian, ranked 85th in the world, had beaten Babos in their last encounter at the 2015 Qatar Total Open in Doha. She had earlier knocked out fifth seed Yulia Putintseva of Kazakhstan and former Wimbledon finalist Sabine Lisicki of Germany in the semifinal before facing Babos.

Prolific Al Khelaifi notches a double again at Losail

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Defending champion Abdullah Al Khelaifi enjoyed another perfect round at the Qatar Touring Car Championship as he again clinched a double at Losail International Circuit on Saturday.

In the first race, Al Khelaifi, who started from pole position, took the lead from the start to the checkered flag and emerged the winner in front of Mansoor Al Hajri by 1.516. The third place in the podium was for Adham El Dib.

Second race, with the reverse grid and starting from the last position in the grid, Al Khelaifi had a big fight with Mansoor Al Hajri and Adham El Dib but again he took the win.

In the second race, he crossed the line in front of Al Asam by 1.241. Al Hajri was again in the podium in third position.

Al Khelaifi was delighted with another double victory.

"In the first race, my start was good. Hamad had a problem in the start so I secured first corner and from there I built a gap but Mansoor also took advantage of Hamad problem and he got close to me," he said.

"Then Mansoor started to put pressure. I started to put pressure on myself, so when he released I also released. The weather was very hot for the tyres and it was very difficult, so at the end of the race we all slowed down to cool down the tyres," Al Khelaifi said.

"The second race was more exciting as I started in the last position. I had a big fight with Mansoor at the beginning and then with Hamad. Hamad was hard to pass as he had advantage in the straights and I didn't have advantage there, only in the corners, so I tried to cut breaking him and then built the same gap as race 1 and control the race



The podium winners after the second race at Losail International Circuit on Saturday.



After the third round, Al Khelaifi leads the standings with 116 points. Adham Eldib is second with 69 points and Mansoor Al Hajri third with 66 points.

from there," he added.

"At the end of the race I had overheating and Hamad had good plan to keep the tires cold until the last lap, where he pushed the gap really quickly. I was so nervous at the last lap but I managed to finish first," he concluded.

Al Hajri, after previous

rounds struggling with his car, managed to fix the car and came back to the podium.

"Finally, after two rounds of struggling I am back in the podium. I wasn't really prepared for this championship this season, actually I wasn't to start as I had some problems and was not sure if I would participate this year," said Al Hajri.

"In the first two rounds, I found a lot of issues with my car and finally I fixed it and I am back on the podium. Sadly some of the competitors were not taking part in this round but my lap time proves that I can be competitive and I can stay with the leader, with Abdullah who is flying... I need to do a lot of work," added Al Hajri.

"The Race 2 with the reverse grid was very difficult. I managed

to get into the first five position in the first lap but later it was very hard to get to the third position. Adham was very fast and he was blocking very well but I managed to pass him.

"Then Hamad and Abdullah had a really good gap. I tried in the last two laps to catch them but I needed more than two laps to at least have a challenge to fight with them but I am happy that I am back to my performance and I got good results this weekend," Al Hajri said.

El Dib, who had a problem in the previous round with the gearbox, managed to be on the podium in the first race as in second race he finished in sixth place.

"During the practice sessions, I was doing really bad timings because of the problem

I had last round that I had to change the gearbox but I managed to do some adjustments and it works. Race one was fantastic with Hamad and Mahmoud leading at the beginning but I just kept a bit behind them knowing that they would slow each other then and I managed to pass them. Happy to be back on podium again," he said.

After the third round, Al Khelaifi leads the standings with 116 points. Adham Eldib is second with 69 points and Mansoor Al Hajri third with 66 points.

Trophies were presented by QMFM President Abdulrahman Al Mannai and QMFM General Secretary Abdulrazzak Al Kuwari.

The next round of Qatar Touring Car Championship will be held on February 16 and 17.

Russia's Gassiev knocks out Dorticcos

AFP

MOSCOW: Russia's Murat Gassiev retained his IBF cruiserweight belt and grabbed the WBA cruiserweight title with a technical knockout of Cuban Yulier Dorticcos in a unification bout in Russia's resort city Sochi on Saturday.

Gassiev, 24, the youngest member of the cruiserweight field of the World Boxing Super Series (WBSS) improved his record to 27-0 with 19 KO's following the semi-final win in Sochi's Bolshoy Ice Dome.

The 31-year-old previously unbeaten Dorticcos -- nicknamed "The KO Doctor" -- has now dropped to 22-1 with 21 knockouts.

Dorticcos started confidently trying to control the pace of the fight from the start. He performed some good jab work, while Gassiev also landed effective punches in the opening round.

The Cuban continued to push the pace with the hard punches in the second but Gassiev replied positively landing some more solid shots of his own into his opponent's body. Later on Dorticcos continued peppering his rival with shots but his unvaried attacks made little headway as Gassiev defended stoutly responding with rare but hard and precise punches.

After the eighth round Dorticcos' work rate noticeably slowed down and Gassiev stepped up the pressure, beginning to take control and show off his superior hand speed and precision.

In the final round Gassiev looked in complete command sending Dorticcos to the canvas twice before the referee stopped the bout with just 18 seconds remaining.

IOC chief 'disappointed' over lifting of Russian doping bans

AFP

PYEONGCHANG: Olympics chief Thomas Bach called for reforms to the Court of Arbitration for Sport yesterday as he slammed its "extremely disappointing" decision to lift life bans for doping imposed on 28 Russian athletes.

Bach said the International Olympic Committee's executive board was "not satisfied at all" with the approach by CAS, whose decision came just days before the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang.

Last week, the independent sports tribunal cited insufficient evidence as it lifted the bans, adding to the sense of confusion surrounding Russia at the Games in South Korea.

Although Russia has been banned from the Games following the discovery of a wide-ranging doping conspiracy, 169 athletes are due to compete under a neutral flag as "Olympic Athletes from Russia".

"We feel that this decision shows the urgent need for reforms in the internal structure of CAS," Bach said, after a two-day meeting of the IOC's executive board.

"And that means in particular that CAS has to change its structure in a way that it can better manage the quality and the consistency of its jurisdiction."

Bach said an IOC panel would announce in the "next



couple of days" whether 15 of the now-reinstated Russians -- 13 athletes and two coaches -- would be invited to take part in Pyeongchang. The rest of the 28 have either retired or are unavailable for undisclosed reasons.

"The absence of sanctions by CAS does not mean that you are entitled to receive an invitation from the IOC because receiving this invitation is a privilege of clean Russian athletes," Bach warned.

He added that the request to reform CAS has already been forwarded to John Coates, president of its governing body ICA, who was "very appreciative".

It is the second successive Olympics where the IOC has been embroiled in problems involving Russian doping, after

accusations of systemic drug cheating blew up just before Rio 2016.

Russia topped the medals table when it hosted the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics. But it later emerged that dirty samples involving its athletes were switched using a "mousehole" in the anti-doping laboratory's wall.

"This CAS decision is extremely disappointing and surprising for the IOC," Bach said. "We would never have expected this."

Bach said that Olympic officials had asked CAS for an explanation for their ruling and had been told no full accounting would be released until the end of February.

The Games in South Korea end on February 25.

He added that so far, the IOC knew only what had been released by CAS in a press statement, calling it "extremely unsatisfactory given the gravity of the cases".

The IOC's disciplinary commission banned 43 Russian athletes for life and disqualified all Russians from competing at the Pyeongchang Games over a state-sponsored doping conspiracy.

It later ruled that 169 athletes who had proved they were clean would be allowed to compete.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport on Thursday upheld the appeals of the 28 Russians against the Olympic life bans, ruling there was "insufficient" evidence they had benefited from the doping system at Sochi 2014.

Shi defeats Chou to clinch India Open

AFP

NEW DELHI: Shi Yuqi became the first Chinese player to win the India Open men's singles badminton title, defeating Chou Tien-chen in the final in New Delhi yesterday.

Fourth-seed Shi overcame tough resistance from Chou, seeded third, to win the clash 21-18, 21-14 in 47 minutes.

Chou, who lost his second successive final in the BWF World Tour Super 500 tournament, took an early lead and had a four-point advantage at the mid-game break at 11-7.

But Shi fought back, getting nine points on the trot to win the first game in 24 minutes and carrying the momentum into the second game. It was 21-year-old Shi's fourth major career title, after he won the France SuperSeries 2016 and

two Grand Prix gold medals.

"Last year I didn't win any tournament, so glad to win this and hope this (is the) first of many to come," world number eight Yuqi said.

In the women's singles, Beiwen Zhang won a hard-fought battle against top-seed Pusarla Venkata Sindhu of India 21-18, 11-21, 22-20 in one hour and nine minutes.

It was fifth-seeded Zhang's first major world title as she survived a championship point at 19-21 to win the third and deciding game.

Sindhu, who won the 2017 India Open, came back fighting in the second game but fell to Zhang's aggressive play.

"I had nothing (to) lose, but I think she took more pressure than me and she couldn't control," the China-born Zhang said.



China's Shi Yuqi (right) and Taiwan's Chou Tien Chen (left) pose for a picture after the men's singles final in New Delhi, yesterday.

Rockets rout Cavs; Nuggets claim win

LOS ANGELES: Chris Paul finished with 22 points and 11 assists as the Houston Rockets became the latest team to pummel LeBron James' struggling Cleveland Cavaliers with a 120-88 win on Saturday.

The Rockets did it without a big night from James Harden who finished with 16 points, while on the other side James had just 11 points and didn't play at all in the fourth quarter with the game out of reach.

Harden has been averaging 31 points a game this season for the Rockets, who won their fourth consecutive game and their 11th in their last 13. Ryan Anderson stepped in with 21 points.

Since losing at Golden State on Christmas Day, Cleveland have been humiliated in several matchups against top level NBA clubs. They lost by 28 at Minnesota, 34 in Toronto, 24 at home to Oklahoma City and now by 32 to the Rockets.

The Cavaliers looked nothing like the team that has made it to the last three NBA finals.

"I'm lost for words," James said.

The defending Eastern Conference champs played their second game without injured all-star forward Kevin Love, who suffered a broken left hand earlier this week and could be out for two months.

Isaiah Thomas scored 12 for Cleveland, who have lost 12 of

NBA RESULTS			
La Clippers	113	Chicago	103
Detroit	111	Miami	107
Indiana	100	Philadelphia	92
Washington	115	Orlando	98
Houston	120	Cleveland	88
Minnesota	118	New Orleans	107
Utah	120	San Antonio	111
Denver	115	Golden State	108
Dallas	106	Sacramento	99

18 and don't seem to have any answers on the floor for what ails them.

"They should take us off every nationally televised game for the rest of the season," said James.

"We haven't played good at all and we get our butts kicked every time we play on national television, so I'm at a loss for words."

In Denver, Nikola Jokic scored 19 points and added nine rebounds as the Nuggets came from behind to beat the Golden State Warriors 115-108.

Denver rallied from a 12-point deficit in the second half to hand the Warriors their second loss in three games.

"For us to come and get the defending world champs was huge," said Denver's Gary Harris, who tallied 16 points.

Will Barron had 25 points and Harris 16 for the Nuggets, who split the four games with Golden State this season.

Kevin Durant scored 31 points and Stephen Curry had 24 for Golden State.



Golden State Warriors centre Zaza Pachulia (left) guards Denver Nuggets centre Nikola Jokic during their NBA game on Saturday.



Chris Paul (left) of the Houston Rockets shoots over Jeff Green of the Cleveland Cavaliers during their NBA game on Saturday.

"They hit some shots tonight," Durant said. "We made plays but down the stretch we couldn't get it done."

In Detroit, Andre Drummond had 23 points and 20 rebounds and Ish Smith tallied a season-high 25, including a clutch triple in the final minute, as the Detroit Pistons beat the Miami Heat 111-107.

Blake Griffin helped offset a poor shooting night by making a key three pointer with 44 seconds remaining in the fourth.

The 28-year-old Griffin, who spent all eight NBA seasons with the Los Angeles Clippers before being traded to the Pistons on Monday, missed his first five shots from beyond the arc before making one in the final minute. He finished six-of-19 from the field with 16 total points. The Pistons won their third straight game since the trade and are 2-0 with Griffin in uniform as they pulled within a game of .500

with a 25-26 record on the season.

Goran Dragic scored 33 points for the Heat, who have lost three in a row. Miami was missing center Hassan Whiteside, who was sidelined with an illness.

With the Pistons ahead by four and 44 seconds to play, Griffin hit a triple to give Detroit a 108-101 lead.

Dragic responded with a four-point play, making a three-pointer while being fouled with 32 seconds left.

Detroit ran the clock down and on the next possession Griffin found a wide-open Smith who sank his only three-point attempt of the game with 14 seconds left to restore the lead to six points.

Elsewhere, Tobias Harris scored 24 points in his Clippers' debut, leading Los Angeles to a 113-103 victory over the Chicago Bulls.

Zajac's 3 points lead Devils past Penguins

NEWARK: Travis Zajac scored two goals and set up another as the New Jersey Devils limited Pittsburgh to a season-low 16 shots in posting a 3-1 victory on Saturday night, ending the Penguins' four-game winning streak.

Blake Coleman also scored and Stefan Noesen had two assists in helping the Devils win their third straight since returning from the All-Star break. Keith Kinkaid made 15 saves and benefited from a goaltender interference call that denied Sidney Crosby a third-period goal.

Evgeni Malkin, the NHL player of the month in January with 12 goals, scored in the third period. He now has eight goals in his last four games, 15 since January 1, and 29 overall. Rookie goaltender Casey Desjardis made 35 saves for the Penguins, who looked sluggish after beating Washington on Friday night. Sidney Crosby, who also missed an open net in the second period, had his 11-game point scoring streak stopped. The run is tied for the NHL best this season.

Lightning 4, Canucks 2
Yanni Gourde scored late in the second period to give Tampa Bay a three-goal lead, and they went on to their fifth win in six games.

Chris Kunitz, Victor Hedman and Cory Conacher also scored for Eastern Conference-leading Tampa Bay, and Andrei Vasilevsky stopped 31 shots. Nikita Kucherov had two assists. Thomas Vanek and Brock Boeser scored for the Canucks, who were vying to

win their third straight at home for the first time this season. Jacob Markstrom finished with 24 saves.

Kings 6, Coyotes 0
Darcy Kuemper made 27 saves for his 10th career shut-out. Jake Muzzin and Trevor Lewis scored on special teams, and Los Angeles won its second straight against the Pacific Division after five straight regulation losses.

Dustin Brown, Anze Kopitar, Adrian Kempe and Alex Iafallo each had a goal and an assist for the Kings.

Scott Wedgewood made 29 saves for the Coyotes, who had their streak of four consecutive wins against the Kings and three straight in Los Angeles end.

Jets 3, Avalanche 0
Connor Hellebuyck stopped 25 shots for his fifth shutout of the season as Winnipeg improved to 5-0-2 in its last seven games.

Patrick Laine scored his team-leading 24th goal, rookie Jack Roslovic was credited with his second and Nikolaj Ehlers added an empty-netter for the Jets. Blake Wheeler had two assists.

Ducks 5, Canadiens 2
man Jeff Petry scored two goals to help Montreal end a three-game losing streak.

Logan Shaw, Joe Morrow and David Schlemko also scored for the Canadiens.

Corey Perry and Rikard Rakell scored for Anaheim, which was coming off an overtime loss in Ottawa on Thursday night. The Ducks outshot Montreal 45-29, but Antti Niemi, starting in place of Carey Price, made several brilliant stops.



New Jersey Devils' players celebrate their goal against the Pittsburgh Penguins on Saturday.

Brady wins MVP; Rams, Saints shine at NFL Honors

MINNESOTA: New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady became the oldest ever to win the AP's Most Valuable Player Award on Saturday, doing so at age 40.

Brady claimed 40 of the 50 votes from a national panel of media, with the Los Angeles Rams' Todd Gurley garnering eight votes and Philadelphia's Carson Wentz getting two. Injured Patriots team-mate Julian Edelman accepted the award on Brady's behalf at the NFL Honors ceremony in Minneapolis.

The award is Brady's third MVP honor, tying him with Jim Brown, Johnny Unitas and Brett Favre for second most all-time. Peyton Manning holds the record with five.

Brady thanked his teammates in an acceptance video posted to the Patriots' Twitter account after he received the honor.

"I'm very humbled and honored to accept this award tonight," Brady said.

"In a team sport like football, you certainly can't achieve anything as an individual without incredible teammates and incredible coaches who have really committed so much to our team this year."

It was the 10th time in the past 11 seasons that a quarterback won the award, a streak broken only by Adrian Peterson in 2012. A different QB has won it in each of the past five seasons. Brady previously won it in 2007 and 2010.

The 18-year veteran led the NFL in passing attempts (581), yards (4,577) and yards per game (286.1) this season while throwing for 32 scores and eight interceptions. Only Alex Smith (104.7) and Drew Brees (103.9) finished with a better passer rating than Brady's 102.8.

Brady will try to be the super player to win MVP and the Super Bowl in the same season since Kurt Warner did so in 1999. The last eight MVPs to appear in the Super Bowl wound up on the losing team, including Brady in 2007.

The Los Angeles Rams made



New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady talks during a media availability at the Super Bowl LII Media Center last week.

noise at the NFL Honors show on Saturday, with running back Todd Gurley claiming Offensive Player of the Year, defensive tackle Aaron Donald winning Defensive Player of the Year and Sean McVay grabbing Coach of the Year.

Donald became the first pure defensive tackle to win the top

defensive award since Warren Sapp in 1999, garnering 23 of 50 votes. He edged Jacksonville's Calais Campbell (17 votes). Arizona's Chandler Jones, who led the league in sacks (17), tackles for loss (28) and quarterback hits (33), received five votes.

Donald finished the year with 11 sacks, 15 tackles for loss

and 27 quarterback hits, most or tied for most among defensive tackles in each category. He earned his fourth Pro Bowl appearance in as many seasons and third consecutive first-team All-Pro selection.

"Words can't express what I'm feeling right now," Donald said. "Trying to hold back the tears."

The 26-year-old is headed into the final year of his rookie contract, a fifth-year option that will pay him \$6.9 million. Rams general manager Les Snead said in January that an extension for Donald is a "major priority" this offseason.

Gurley also had a remarkable campaign, leading the league in yards from scrimmage (2,093) and touchdowns (19). He narrowly missed out on the rushing title after sitting out the Rams' meaningless Week 17 finale.

"It just tells you the type of players we have on the team," Gurley said of the Rams claiming top offensive and defensive honors.

The 23-year-old back earned his second Pro Bowl nod and an

All-Pro selection, the first of his career.

Gurley and Donald are both former Rookie of the Year winners, as Gurley took offensive honors in 2015 and Donald won on defense in 2014.

Another NFC running back claimed the Offensive Rookie of the Year title this season, New Orleans Saints third-round pick Alvin Kamara.

Kamara had just 120 carries all year, but his 6.1 yards-per-carry average led all running backs by more than a full yard. Only quarterback Cam Newton (5.4) was remotely close among all players.

The 22-year-old Tennessee product also caught 81 passes for 826 yards and finished third in the league in scrimmage yards (1,901) and second in total touchdowns (15), including one that came via kick return.

Kamara received 28 votes, edging Kansas City's Kareem Hunt (21). Houston's Deshaun Watson received the other vote despite missing the second half of the year with a torn anterior cruciate ligament.

'Extremely worried' IOC threatens to expel boxing

AFP

PYEONGCHANG: The International Olympic Committee (IOC) threatened to axe boxing from the Tokyo 2020 Games yesterday as it opened an investigation into the sport's controversial governing body and said concerns lingered over possible match-fixing at Rio 2016.

The IOC's executive board also froze contacts with and financial payments to the International Amateur

Boxing Association (AIBA), whose interim president has been named as a leading criminal by the US Treasury Department.

The board said it was "not satisfied" with a report by AIBA about its governance, refereeing and anti-doping issues, and demanded a further report by April 30.

"The IOC reserves the right to review the inclusion of boxing on the programme of the Youth Olympic Games Buenos

Aires 2018 and the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020," a statement said.

AIBA responded later on Sunday with a statement that insisted it had followed "the IOC's request to submit a Progress Report".

"This decision is extremely disappointing for AIBA as it hoped the IOC Executive Board would have understood that the processes necessary to implement even more measures require more time," the

statement said yesterday. IOC president Thomas Bach said AIBA had been asked to provide more information about accusations of fixing at the Rio Olympics, where a group of officials were sent home following a number of controversial decisions.

"We are still looking into this issue... we want them to (give) a satisfying explanation," Bach said, adding: "We are extremely worried about the governance of AIBA."

AIBA's interim president, Gafur Rakhimov, has been described as "one of Uzbekistan's leading criminals" by the US Treasury Department, which has frozen his assets in the country and claims he has links to the heroin trade.

Rakhimov, 66, came to power last month following the abrupt resignation of Italy's Franco Falcinelli, who was briefly interim president after Taiwan's Wu Ching-Kuo stepped down in November.

"Our message to the IOC and to the world of boxing is that AIBA is turning over a new leaf and we intend to demonstrate our responsibility to all national federations and our commitment to the sport we all love," Rakhimov said in an AIBA statement last week.

Boxing, one of the core Olympic sports, has been contested at every edition of the Games apart from Stockholm in 1912, because it was banned in Sweden at the time.

Naduva hat-trick as Fiji shock SA in final

AFP

HAMILTON: A flying Alasio Sovita Naduva bagged three tries as Fiji came from behind for a shock win over South Africa in the final of the World Rugby Sevens Series in Hamilton yesterday.

It was the first time Fiji have made a final this season and the win lifted them from fifth to third on the table as they became the fourth different winner in four legs.

"I'm speechless," captain Jerry Tuwai said after his Pacific islanders overhauled a 12-point deficit at half-time with three tries in the second half.

"We have a very young team and I'm really happy with the way the guys performed."

Tuwai said that with South Africa ahead 17-5 at the midway stage he urged his side not to give up.

"I told the boys this is the last game, after this we go home, so play as a team and give it everything."

Fiji were on the back foot 30 seconds into the game when Josua Vakurubani was yellow carded and during his absence Kwagga Smith scored the opening try for South Africa.

Naduva replied with his first try before Kyle Brown and Branco du Preez crossed to give South Africa a substantial lead.

The second half, however,



Fiji pose to celebrate after winning the final gold medal match at the World Rugby Sevens Series between Fiji and South Africa at Waikato Stadium in Hamilton yesterday.



I'm speechless. We have a very young team and I'm really happy with the way the guys performed: Captain Jerry Tuwai

was all Fiji with two further tries to Naduva and one from Eroni Sau to reverse last year's result

when they lost the final to South Africa in New Zealand.

South Africa had been the form team of the tournament as they cruised through pool play without being extended and then moved through the quarter and semi-finals beating Scotland 22-0 and Australia 24-5.

It was not such a smooth run for Fiji who needed their get-out-of-jail card to beat Samoa 12-10 in the quarter-finals with Kaloni Nasoko running 95

metres to score the winning try on the last play of the game.

They lost Sevuoni Mocoenacagi for the final two matches after he was suspended for two games for a dangerous tackle, but still had just enough firepower to beat New Zealand 14-12 in the semi-finals.

Australia beat New Zealand 8-7 in the play-off for third with the winning points coming from a penalty by Jim Stannard on full-time.

US down Argentina to open Americas Rugby defence

AFP

LOS ANGELES: The United States launched their defence of the Americas Rugby Championship with a dramatic 17-10 triumph over Argentina XV on Saturday at StubHub Center in Los Angeles.

The contest went down to the wire, as a last-gasp attack from Argentina saw Rodrigo Bruni cross the line only to knock on.

Juan Capiello was shown yellow in just the seventh minute for a late tackle on Marcel Brache.

Will Magie couldn't connect on the penalty, but landed his second attempt to put the Americans up 3-0.

Argentina fought their way back into it with a penalty from Juan Cruz Gonzalez and a try from Santiago Montagner who powered over with the man advantage with Cam Dolan in the sin bin.

The conversion was good to put Argentina up 10-3 at half-time, but the hosts dominated after the break.

Magie closed the gap with his second penalty and the

Eagles got a try as Tony Lam-born ripped through two defenders to sweep around the corner and regain the lead for the United States.

With both teams looking to their replacements, former England under-20 fly-half Will Hooley came on for Magie to make his first appearance in an Eagles jersey and slotted two penalties to make it 17-10.

A desperate Argentina looked to have produced the try they needed, but Bruni lost possession of the ball before the grounding and upon video review the try was waved off.

In the day's other match, Brazil edged Chile 16-14 in Santiago, their first victory ever on Chilean soil.

Jardel Vettorato dived over for a try for Brazil and Josh Reeves contributed the conversion and three penalties as Brazil posted their first away win in ARC play.

The tournament continues next weekend, when Brazil host Uruguay at Sao Paulo, Argentina XV host Chile at Ushuaia and the United States host Canada in Sacramento, California.

Six Nations chiefs to probe France head injuries

AFP

LONDON: Six Nations chiefs yesterday revealed they will review several incidents relating to head injury protocols in Ireland's 15-13 win over France.

France stars Matthieu Jalibert and Antoine Dupont suffered knee injuries, but were also sent for head injury assessments (HIAs) in Saturday's clash.

France coach Jacques Brunel claimed this was ordered by the independent doctor at the Stade de France in Paris.

Dupont's departure for an HIA was particularly controversial as it allowed starting scrum-half Maxime Machenaud to return to the field instead of forcing France to bring on wing Benjamin Fall instead.

That would have forced France into a baseline reshuffle. Former Ireland skipper Brian O'Driscoll (pictured) was among those who questioned the fairness of the decisions.

O'Driscoll tweeted: "Just because we won with an INCREDIBLE 42 METER drop goal that HIA decision shouldn't get swept under the carpet. It was nothing short of a disgrace!"

Yesterday, the Six Nations announced in a statement: "The HIA review processor is reviewing a number of incidents from



the France v Ireland match in the senior men's championship.

"Depending on their findings, Six Nations Rugby Limited (SNRL) will be considering the next steps in respect of those incidents."

The statement said sanctions could be imposed -- without saying who to -- and changes made to the process, depending on the review panel's findings.

"The HIA review panel can as part of its review make recommendations (among other things) as to further education and training that is required, and/or whether disciplinary action should be taken by SNRL. This two-stage review process is required by World Rugby."

Both Dupont and Jalibert suffered cruciate knee ligament damage, with the former's season now over and the latter likely to miss the rest of the Six Nations.



France's Antoine Dupont lies on the pitch after being injured Saturday.

Season over for Dupont; Jalibert out for month

AFP

PARIS: Talented young France scrum-half Antoine Dupont's season is over due to a knee injury suffered against Ireland, national team coach Jacques Brunel said yesterday.

Meanwhile, teenage fly-half Matthieu Jalibert, who made his debut in Saturday's dramatic 15-13 Six Nations defeat, will likely miss the rest of the tournament, likewise due to a knee injury.

Dupont, 20, suffered a ruptured cruciate ligament during a nine-minute cameo on Saturday, while the 19-year-old Jalibert has a partially torn knee ligament.

"He will be out for a minimum of one month, perhaps two," said Brunel of Jalibert.

The Bordeaux-Begles No.10 could be fit again for France's final two tournament matches, at home to England on March 10 and away to Wales a week later.

Back-row forward Kevin Gournon will be out for up to a month after twisting his ankle against Ireland, meaning he will certainly miss next week's trip to Scotland and possibly also the clash with Italy in Marseille on February 23.

Centre Henry Chavancy has been passed fit, though, after a suspicion of an ankle injury and fractured eyebrow. The injuries mean there could

be a return to the France squad for experienced Toulon fly-half Francois Trinh-Duc, who was surprisingly left out by Brunel.

Dupont's most likely replacements will be either Lyon's Baptiste Couilloud or Alexi Bales of La Rochelle. Gournon's injury could see Louis Picamoles recalled to the squad after poor recent form saw him left out of Brunel's original group.

Former Toulouse and Northampton No.8 Picamoles responded to his France snub with an impressive performance in French Top 14 leaders Montpellier's 30-29 win at champions Clermont last week. Brunel, who made his

debut as France coach against Ireland, already faces the task of rebuilding his team, which has now gone seven Tests without a victory, before next week's trip to Murrayfield.

"It's a slight hammer blow, but the competition continues," Brunel said of the last-gasp Ireland defeat.

"You have to get up, revive the spirits a bit and start tomorrow."

Brunel also admitted that it may have been a mistake to let replacement fly-half Anthony Belleau, who looks in line to start against Scotland, take a crucial late penalty that could have handed France victory.



The way our spinners are bowling I am pretty confident we can continue (with) the same momentum.

Virat Kohli, Indian cricket captain.



FOOTBALL
Watford vs Chelsea
English Premier League

Football
Las Palmas vs Malaga
La Liga

Chahal puts South Africa in a spin

AFP

CENTURION, SOUTH AFRICA: Indian captain Virat Kohli said after a crushing win in the second one-day international at SuperSport Park yesterday that he wanted his match-winning wrist spinners to continue to put pressure on South Africa's batsmen.

Yuzvendra Chahal and Kuldeep Yadav set up a nine-wicket win which gave India a 2-0 lead in the six-match series.

Leg-spinner Chahal picked up a career-best five for 22 and left-arm Yadav took three for 20 as South Africa were bowled out for 118, the lowest total in one-day internationals at the ground.

SCOREBOARD

South Africa	
H Amla c Dhoni b Kumar	23
O de Kock c Pandya b Chahal	20
A Markose c Kumar b Kuldeep Yadav	8
D Jurney b Chahal	25
D Miller c Rabaneke b Kuldeep Yadav	0
K Zondo c Pandya b Chahal	25
C Morris c Kumar b Chahal	14
K Rabada b Kuldeep Yadav	1
M Morkel b Chahal	1
Imran Tahir b Bumrah	0
T Shamsi (not out)	0
Extras (Wt)	1
Total (22.2 overs)	118
Fall of wickets: 1-39, 2-51, 3-51, 4-51, 5-99, 6-107, 7-110, 8-117, 9-118	

"We know that their middle order is inexperienced and we want to cash in on that in the future games and put some real pressure on them," said Kohli.

"The way our spinners are bowling I am pretty confident we can continue (with) the same momentum."

Both Indian spinners extracted a surprising amount of turn on a dry pitch which man of the match Chahal admitted was helpful. "We also play in these conditions in India," he said.

Kohli said it had been a complete bowling performance, with new ball bowlers Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Jasprit Bumrah setting the tone.

"They didn't let South Africa



Indian bowler Yuzvendra Chahal (right) celebrates the dismissal of South African batsman JP Duminy (centre) during the second One Day International match at Centurion cricket ground yesterday.

get away with scoring too many runs," he said.

South Africa made a reasonable start, with Hashim Amla and Quinton de Kock putting on 39 for the first wicket before Amla was caught behind off Kumar. De Kock fell to Chahal, one of three batsmen to fall with the

total on 51 as the spinners took control.

"We knew if we got those two at the top, their middle order is inexperienced and a bit shaky," said Kohli.

"The spinners were outstanding. They were getting bounce and pace off the wicket,

which worked in our favour."

With star players Faf du Plessis and AB de Villiers both missing because of injury, it was a chastening introduction to the South African captaincy for Aiden Markram.

The 23-year-old was appointed for the rest of the

series after Du Plessis broke his right index finger in the first match in Durban on Thursday.

"We are going to have to be really honest with ourselves," said Markram. "Every person will have to see how we can get better."

India came within two runs of winning before lunch when the umpires stuck to the letter of the regulations and insisted on a break after allowing an extra four overs or 15 minutes to achieve a result. India had been 93 for one at the scheduled interval.

Most of a capacity crowd left the ground before Kohli scored the winning runs.

After South Africa's mini collapse with the total on 51, JP Duminy and new cap Khaya Zondo both scored 25 and shared a fifth wicket partnership of 48 before the last six wickets tumbled for 19 runs.

India started aggressively, with Rohit Sharma pulling Morne Morkel for six in the first over of their innings.

Sharma fell for 15, caught by Morkel at fine leg off Kagiso Rabada, but Shikhar Dhawan and Kohli put on an unbeaten 91 for the second wicket to secure an easy win. Dhawan finished with 51 not out and Kohli made 46 not out.

Mominul guides Bangladesh to draw with record ton

AFP

CHITTAGONG, BANGLADESH: Mominul Haque became the first player from Bangladesh to score a century in both innings of a Test as he steered his side to a draw in the opening match against Sri Lanka yesterday.

Mominul, who made 176 in the first innings, hit 105 off 174 balls to help Bangladesh reach 307-5 before the teams agreed the draw with an hour's play left on the fifth and final day in Chittagong.

Skipper Mahmudullah was at the crease on 28 not out alongside Mosaddik Hossain (8 not out) when the stumps were drawn at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. Sri Lanka held a 200-run first innings lead after declaring on a mammoth 713-9 in reply to Bangladesh's 513.

"I would put my second century ahead of the first one because it helped us save the game," Mominul said.

"We have been in this situation before. You have to be mentally strong and believe in yourself."

The visitors fancied their chances for a victory when veteran spinner Rangana Herath picked up the crucial wicket of Mushfiqur Rahim off the last ball on the fourth day.

But Mominul, 18 not out overnight,

SCOREBOARD

Bangladesh (1 innings)	513
Sri Lanka (1 innings)	713-9 dec.
Bangladesh (II innings)	
Tamim Iqbal c Dickwella b Sandakan	41
Imrul Kayes c Chandimal b Perera	19
Mominul Haque c Karunaratne b de Silva	105
Mushfiqur Rahim c Mendis b Herath	2
Liton Das c Perera b Herath	94
Mahmudullah (not out)	28
Mosaddik Hossain (not out)	8
Extras (LB, WB)	40
Total (five wickets: 100 overs)	307
Fall of wickets: 1-52, 2-76, 3-91, 4-261, 5-279	
Did not bat: Mehedi Hasan, Tajul Islam, Sunzamul Islam, Mustafizur Rahman	
Bowling: Herath 28-6-80-2, Lakmal 9-1-25-0 (nbt), de Silva 12-0-41-1, Perera 26-5-74-1 (nbt), Sandakan 18-2-64-1 (nbt), Kumara 6-0-16-0 (w), Mendis 1-0-2-0	
Result: Draw	

and Liton Das, who fell just six runs short of his maiden Test century, shared a crucial 180-run stand for the fourth wicket to frustrate the Sri Lankan bowlers.

It was Dhananjaya de Silva who broke their partnership, dismissing Mominul shortly after the left-hander scored his second century of the game with a single off Lakshan Sandakan.

Dimuth Karunaratne took the catch at slip to bring the curtains down on a fine innings, featuring five fours and two sixes.

Karunaratne, who was out for a duck in Sri Lanka's first innings, criticised the batsman-friendly pitch.

"I don't think this is a good wicket for Test cricket because already 1,500 runs have been scored," he said.

"I think there needs to be something for the bowlers as well. I am hopeful we will get a 50-50 wicket in the next Test."

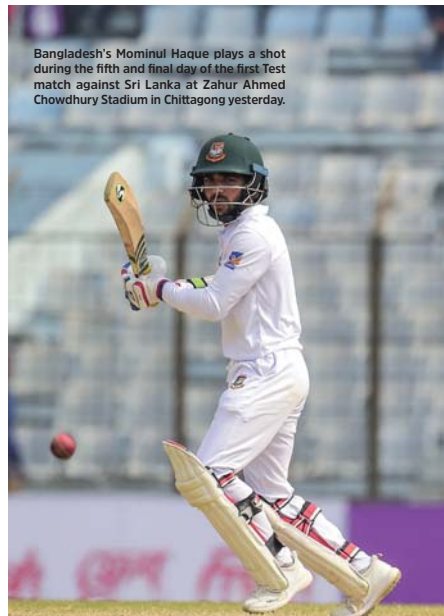
Man of the match Mominul had nicked a delivery from Herath on 89 but wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella failed to grab a low catch.

Liton also looked confident on the other side but his lavish attempt for a six to complete his century brought his downfall.

Dilruwan Perera ran backward from mid-off to take a fine catch off Herath as Liton departed after hitting 11 fours during his 182-ball stay.

A short ball from Lahiru Kumara struck Mominul on the helmet but he appeared unfazed and scored a single off the next ball, becoming the highest run scorer for Bangladesh in a single Test.

Mominul, who reached 56 with the single, overtook Tamim Iqbal's aggregate of 231 runs against Pakistan in Khulna in 2015. Herath finished with 2-80 for Sri Lanka. The second and final Test will start in Dhaka on February 8.



THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The fifth stage of the Royal Air Maroc Cycling League was held last Friday in Al Ruwais.

Starting from Al Shamal Sports Club, more than 100 participants had to tackle with strong north winds which made the flat race seem like it's high mountain area. The race lap of 35 km went from Al Ruwais to Al Gharfiya and back.

The strongest group of Men A category had three laps, the wind prevented any solo effort, the race was decided in a sprint

of small group where Fergal McCool (Velostar) booked in his first victory of the season in front of Fred Watson and Szymon Wasiak.

In Men's B category (two laps) we also saw a new winner - Bilal Al Saadi (national junior team) who managed to hang on to the late attack and won by margin of 12 seconds in front of Christian Hanekke (Velostar) and Andrew Tangonan (Pinoy Roadies) who is leading in RAM league scoring.

Men C's category (two laps) was dominated by Qatar national

team riders, with Hamza Al Kassem winning the race in front of teammate Zaid Hamza and Saeed Al Kuwari (Qatar Cyclists). Zaid Hamza also leads in RAM league for the category.

Women's race A had only two representatives, who started together with Men B. Julie Melville (ABPR) managed to out-sprint Isora Sosa Caballero (Tri Club Doha). Julie extended her lead in the RAM league.

Ladies B category was won by Katherine Gomez (Tri Club Doha) with Dorothy Weymouth (AMPR) and Shawna Garrett (Tri

Club Doha) taking second and third place respectively. With half of the races in the league behind us and the latest victory by Gomez, she already has an extensive lead in the competition.

The race and the league is organized by Qatar Cycling Federation with cooperation of Qatar Chain reaction and sponsored by Royal Air Maroc, Rayyan natural water and Go Sport.

Next event will happen after two weeks on February 16 on roads of Al Ghuwailiyriyah.

The podium winners at the fifth stage of the Royal Air Maroc Cycling League at Al Ruwais.

