> The number one ranking is in my head a little bit, but no more than that. It's a mini-goal. It would be nice to stay there but it's no more important than that.



World Number One
Roger Federer

TODAY'S ACTION

CRICKET
England vs New Zealand
3rd Test - Day 3
at Newlands, Cape Town

CRICKET
South Africa vs Australia
1st Test - Day 3
at Eden Park, Auckland (d/n)



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton takes a selfie as he gets ready for the second Formula One practice session in Melbourne yesterday, ahead of the Formula One Australian Grand Prix.

Hamilton is fastest but Red Bull, Ferrari in hunt

REUTERS

MELBOURNE: Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton topped the timesheets for Mercedes in both practice sessions at the Australian Grand Prix yesterday but Red Bull's Max Verstappen showed enough pace to give the Silver Arrows pause for thought.

After lapping Albert Park in one minute, 24.026 seconds to dominate the first practice of the new season, Hamilton improved the mark slightly to 1:23.931 in the second session on a balmy autumn day.

"The car is quicker here than it was last year, so it feels better everywhere," the four-times champion told reporters.

"It closed up a little bit in FP2 in terms of the gap between us all, but that's exciting. It's more challenging for me to try and eke out a little more from the car."

Red Bull's Dutch wunderkind Verstappen was snapping at his heels, however, finishing only 0.127 seconds adrift of the Briton after the second session.

Raising hopes of a contest for Mercedes, who have swept the driver and constructors' titles for the past four years, there was less than three-tenths of a second separating the champions from the Red Bull and Ferrari cars.

Verstappen sandwiched himself between the Mercedes drivers,

with Hamilton's team mate Valtteri Bottas third quickest despite taking a couple of slides off the track.

"That's what I call a positive start to the season," Verstappen tweeted. "The car handled well and I'm happy with today."

Fourth in FP2, Kimi Raikkonen showed why Ferrari may also be in the hunt for Sunday's race but he will have to face the stewards after allegedly impeding fellow Finn Bottas, who nearly rammed into his rear and ended up in the gravel.

It was a tougher day for Raikkonen's four-times champion team mate Sebastian Vettel, who was more than a half-second off the pace in FP2 down in fifth position, a disappointing run he later downplayed.

"We still have quite a lot of performance in hand. I am not too worried because I know if I get everything right we should be in better shape," the German told reporters.

Red Bull's Daniel Ricciardo was seventh in FP2 but his day ended on a sour note, the home hope handed a three-place grid penalty for going too fast during red flag conditions.

AUSTRALIAN GRAND PRIX FREE PRACTICE TIMES

1. Lewis Hamilton (GBR) Mercedes-AMG 1:24.026
2. Valtteri Bottas (FIN) Mercedes-AMG 1:24.577
3. Max Verstappen (NED) Red Bull 1:24.771
4. Kimi Raikkonen (FIN) Ferrari 1:24.875
5. Sebastian Vettel (GER) Ferrari 1:24.995
6. Daniel Ricciardo (AUS) Red Bull 1:25.063
7. Romain Grosjean (FRA) Haas 1:25.730
8. Fernando Alonso (ESP) McLaren-Honda 1:25.896
9. Carlos Sainz Jr (ESP) Renault 1:25.922
10. Stoffel Vandoorne (BEL) McLaren-Honda 1:26.482
11. Pierre Gasly (FRA) Toro Rosso 1:26.494
12. Sergey Sirotkin (RUS) Williams 1:26.536
13. Nico Hulkenberg (GER) Renault 1:26.583
14. Esteban Ocon (FRA) Force India 1:26.605
15. Lance Stroll (CAN) Williams 1:26.636
16. Sergio Perez (MEX) Force India 1:26.767
17. Kevin Magnussen (DEN) Haas 1:27.035
18. Brendon Hartley (NZL) Toro Rosso 1:27.745
19. Marcus Ericsson (SWE) Sauber 1:27.964
20. Charles Leclerc (MON) Sauber 1:28.853

The second session was suspended for a few minutes after some cabling became unearthed at the start-finish line. Tipped to be the big improvers after a positive pre-season, Haas delivered in spades, with Romain Grosjean sixth quickest in FP2 and his team mate Kevin Magnussen ninth. There was also some encouragement for McLaren, whose day began bleakly with engineers fussing over an exhaust system problem that left twice champion Fernando Alonso and Stoffel Vandoorne confined to the garage for most of the session.

However, Alonso finally emerged to post the eighth fastest lap and held the position through FP2.

Canadian Lance Stroll's day ended in frustration, with his Williams forced to a halt at the end of FP2 with overheating issues. He was 14th for the session, ahead of his debutant team mate Sergey Sirotkin (18th).

While Mercedes showed they hold a slight edge in pace, rain forecast on Saturday could yet add an element of uncertainty during qualifying.

F1 teams urge better deal to avoid breakaway series

AFP

MELBOURNE: Mercedes boss Toto Wolff on Friday urged Formula One owners Liberty Media and the sport's regulators FIA to come up with an improved deal to avoid a breakaway championship.

Formula One's biggest teams Mercedes and Ferrari are questioning some of Liberty's plans for the sport beyond the expiration of the Concorde Agreement -- a deal which binds teams and stakeholders together until the end of 2020.

Disgruntled Ferrari chairman Sergio Marchionne has voiced dissatisfaction with Liberty's proposed re-distribution of prize money, and the concept of a simpler engine.

Wolff, who has overseen the Lewis Hamilton-led Mercedes' dominance of F1 for the past four years, supports Ferrari's stance and did not rule out the prospect of a rebel championship formed by leading teams.

"We are all carrying the torch of a great series and a great brand that was built 40-50 years ago and has tremendous value," he told a news conference ahead of this weekend's season-opening Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne.

"Everybody is trying to position themselves, but all the time with respect for the series and comments that have been made by the Ferrari chairman Sergio Marchionne show that he cares," he added.

"We all have a vision and perspective in Formula One and how we want to see it going forward and it needs to fit that opinion and that is why these statements are being made."

Wolff said the teams owe it to Formula One to get things right and they have at least three more years together before the expiration of the current agreement.

"We just need to give our support in the best possible way to this great sport, regulated by the FIA and owned by Liberty, run by competent men, so we are not devaluing it," he said.

Red Bull team principal Christian Horner said it was up to governing body FIA (Federation Internationale de l'Automobile) and Liberty Media to come up with a deal and present it to the teams.

"My view on this is very simple. Trying to get a consensus between teams of varying objectives and different set-ups is going to be impossible," Horner said at a team principals news conference.

Force India F1 team rules out name change this year

REUTERS

MELBOURNE: Force India will not be changing their name this season despite having a new one in mind, the Formula One team said at the opening Australian Grand Prix.

Chief operating office Otmar Szafnauer said they had run out of time.

"It's not going to happen this year," he told the *formula1.com* website.

"To change chassis name, from what I understand, you can't do it in the middle of the season...

"We went around to find the best name, we had some discussion with partners, sponsors and employees. Then we went to the (governing) FIA and FOM and they said 'well, you're a bit out of time'."

Szafnauer had told reporters during testing in Barcelona last month that a name change could happen before Sunday's race in Melbourne.

Halep rallies to advance in Miami

REUTERS

MIAMI: World number one Simona Halep survived a scare from France's Oceane Dodin on Thursday, beating the lucky loser 3-6, 6-3, 7-5 to reach the Miami Open third round.

An upset looked possible in the first set when Dodin's big first serve troubled Romanian Halep who appeared to be continuing the lacklustre form that got her crushed by Naomi Osaka in the Indian Wells semi-finals last week.

But the defensive-minded Halep, who at times reached down to rub a troublesome right ankle, improved as a match lasting over two hours wore on, getting the better of Dodin in extended rallies and in the key moments of the match.

The turning-point came when Halep had break points at 5-5 in the third set and jumped all over a weak second serve from the 21-year-old Dodin to move ahead.

Halep won the next game to love, rocketing down an ace on match point to set up a meeting with 30th-seeded Pole Agnieszka Radwanska who defeated Belgian Alison Van Uytvanck 6-3, 7-6(4).

Halep has amassed enough ranking points that her number one standing is not in jeopardy in Miami. She would have maintained top spot even if she had lost on Thursday and world number two Caroline Wozniacki went on to win the tournament.

Angelique Kerber, the 10th seed, cruised to a 6-2, 6-2 win over Swede Johanna Larsson, setting up a third-round showdown with Russian 23rd seed Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova.

Fifth-seeded Czech Karolina Pliskova dispatched Russian Ekaterina Makarova 7-5, 7-5 and unseeded German Carina Witthoft upset her 12th-seeded countrywoman Julia Gorges 7-6(2), 4-6, 6-4.

Federer relaxed about No.1 ranking quest



AFP

MIAMI: Roger Federer **(pictured)** said on Thursday that retaining his world number one ranking is no more than a "mini-goal" as he prepares his bid to defend the ATP Miami Open title.

The 36-year-old Swiss star needs to advance to the quarter-finals in Florida to hold on to his number one ranking, or face being supplanted by old rival Rafael Nadal in top spot.

However Federer, who was beaten by Juan Martin Del Potro in Sunday's Indian Wells final, said he is not attaching too much importance to hanging on to his ranking.

"The number one ranking is in my head a little bit, but no more than that," Federer said. "It's a mini-goal. It would be nice to stay there but it's no more important than that.

"You have to win matches to go far here. Going far enough to stay number one, it helps my motivation to have a goal. But even if I don't manage it, it's not the end of the world."

Federer will launch his Miami campaign on Saturday against a qualifier.

Federer, winner of an incredible 20 Grand Slam singles titles, meanwhile spoke admiringly of Del Potro's rehabilitation into the tennis circuit's winners circle following a career-threatening wrist injury.

"I can only look from far away and think, 'I wonder how it was for him.' Hard to imagine how -- most important about having had surgeries, I guess, and being injured is the doubts you have. Are you ever going to come back? And overcoming that fear and gaining confidence again," Federer said. "It's such a nice story because he finally did it, but he had to do it the hard way, put himself out there, knowing he was not going to win all the matches he was going to play.

Williamson notches record ton as New Zealand extend lead

REUTERS

AUCKLAND: Kane Williamson moved into sole possession of the New Zealand Test century record on a rain-disrupted second day of the series opener between a dominant New Zealand and England yesterday.

Williamson, who had resumed on 91, stroked his way to an 18th Test century before the teams were driven off the field for the first time on a day when a little more than 90 minutes of play was completed.

Henry Nicholls was 49 not out and wicketkeeper BJ Watling on 17 when the play was finally abandoned shortly after 9 p.m. (0800 GMT) with New Zealand on 227 for four, a lead of 171 runs.

Despite being in a fantastic position, the hosts would have undoubtedly been both bitterly disappointed and frustrated at not being able to force the game on further.

They had already taken a strong hold of the first day-night Test in New Zealand in the opening 90 minutes of the match when Trent Boult and Tim Southee produced a swing bowling onslaught to dismiss the visitors for a measly 58 runs.


New Zealand's captain Kane Williamson celebrates after reaching his 18th Test century during the second day of the first cricket Test match against England in Auckland yesterday.

Williamson then dominated New Zealand's reply, showcasing all of the talents that have driven him into the record books at a faster rate than former captain Martin Crowe and current team mate Ross Taylor, who are locked on 17 centuries.

After his team resumed on 175-3, he opened his account with minimal effort when he drove Stuart Broad straight down the ground to the long-on boundary to move to 95.

He took his time to reel off the next four runs before he brought up the milestone with a characteristic late dab through gully for a single.

While he raised his bat and took off his helmet to acknowledge applause from the Eden Park crowd, there was typically little in the way of exuberant chest beating. Rain then forced them from the field for the first time about three minutes later.

The 27-year-old, however, was unable to kick on, with England taking the second new ball shortly after they returned and Jimmy Anderson trapped him in front for 102.

Nicholls and Watling then continued to build a huge advantage as they sought to capitalise on the home side's superb bowling display from the first day.

Rain, however, forced them off after about an hour's play in the middle session and while the umpires had expected to resume under lights at 7 p.m., another downpour arrived just as the players were emerging from the changing rooms.

Two further pitch inspections were taken by umpires Paul Reiffel and Bruce Oxenford, who decided the outfield conditions were too wet to resume.

Rain is forecast for each of the remaining three days. The second Test, a standard daytime match, is at Hagley Oval in Christchurch from March 30-April 3.

SCOREBOARD

ENGLAND, first innings 58
NEW ZEALAND, (overnight 175-3)

J. Raval c Bairstow b Anderson	3
T. Latham c Woakes b Broad	26
K. Williamson lbw Anderson	102
R. Taylor c Woakes b Anderson	20
H. Nicholls not out	49
B. Watling not out	17
Extras: (lb7, w5)	12
Total: (for 4 wickets; 92.1 overs)	229

Fall of wickets: 1-8 (Raval), 2-92 (Latham), 3-123 (Taylor), 4-206 (Williamson)
To bat: Colin de Grandhomme, Todd Astle, Tim Southee, Neil Wagner, Trent Boult.
Bowling: Anderson 20-7-53-3, Broad 20-5-37-1, Overton 18-7-43-0, Woakes 23-8-55-0 (1w), Ali 11.1-1-34-0
Toss: New Zealand

Stanikzai propels Afghanistan to World Cup

REUTERS

HARARE: Afghanistan qualified for next year's cricket World Cup as captain Asghar Stanikzai played through the pain barrier to produce a heroic innings and lead them to a five-wicket victory over Ireland yesterday.

Stanikzai returned to the team last week for the closing stages of the qualifying tournament after having surgery to remove his appendix.

He batted in obvious pain and with a heavy dressing under his shirt, to score an unbeaten 39 off 29 balls, as he and Najibullah Zadran saw their team home with five balls to spare.

Ireland scored a modest 209 for seven in their 50 overs in the winner-takes-all match to decide who would join the West Indies in securing a place at the World Cup from the qualifying tournament.

Afghanistan reached their target as Stanikzai squeezed a boundary with the first ball of the last over as they scored 213-5.

Ireland opener Paul Stirling top scored with 55 and Kevin O'Brien hit 41 runs off 37 balls near the end of their innings on a slow wicket as they sought to accelerate the run rate but managed only 81 runs in last 15 overs.

Rashid Khan, who had skippered Afghanistan through most of qualifying tournament in Zimbabwe, took 3-40.

Afghanistan made a positive start in their chase with openers Mohammad Shahzad (54) and Gulbadin Naib (45) putting down the platform for victory. Shahzad was named man of the match.

They will now play the West Indies on Sunday in the final of the qualifying tournament in Harare.

It will be Afghanistan's second World Cup appearance after their debut in 2015 in Australia and New Zealand where they beat Scotland by a single wicket but lost their other five matches.

Morkel reaches 300 club as SA take charge

AFP

CAPE TOWN: Fast bowler Morne Morkel took his 300th Test wicket as South Africa bowled themselves into a strong position on the second day of the third Test against Australia at Newlands yesterday.

Australia were 245 for nine when bad light ended play, 66 runs behind South Africa's first innings total of 311.

But it could have been worse for Australia. They were in deep trouble at 175 for eight before Nathan Lyon hit a Test-best 47 in a ninth wicket partnership of 66 with Tim Paine, who was unbeaten on 33.

Morkel, who will retire from international cricket after the series, took three of the first four Australian wickets to fall and became the fifth South African to join the 300 club.

Morkel dismissed Usman Khawaja and Steve Smith in his first spell, then came back to break a 78-run fourth wicket stand between Cameron Bancroft and Shaun Marsh when Marsh flashed at a wide ball and was caught behind.

Bancroft made 77 off 103 balls with 14 fours but was leg before wicket to Vernon Philander in the last over before tea to leave Australia in a precarious position.


South Africa's Morne Morkel (top) celebrates after taking the wicket of Australia's Shaun Marsh.

Morkel, 33, playing in his 85th Test, took a fourth wicket when Lyon's adventurous 38-ball innings was ended by a catch by Dean Elgar running back from point.

Earlier, Kagiso Rabada was hit for five boundaries in a row by David Warner but won a duel with the Australian opening batsman when he sent Warner's off stump cartwheeling.

Warner was bowled for 30.

Rabada, who had a two-match ban for making contact with Australian captain Steve Smith overturned before the Test, ran down the wicket to celebrate but did not go near the batsman.

But Warner appeared to react to a comment from a spectator in the members' pavilion, stopping and turning as he climbed the steps to the dressing room.

South African opening batsman Dean Elgar equalled a world record when he carried his bat through a completed innings for the third time.

Elgar finished unbeaten on 141. Only Desmond Haynes of the West Indies had previously batted through a Test innings on three occasions.

Smith also equalled a world record when he caught South Africa's last two batsmen for a total of five catches in the innings, the joint most by a fielder.

Although ten other fielders shared the record, Smith was only the second Australian to achieve the feat after Vic Richardson in 1935/36.

Elgar and Rabada frustrated the Australians for 50 minutes as they took South Africa's overnight total from 266 for eight.

They shared a partnership of 50 before off-spinner Nathan Lyon had Rabada caught by Smith at slip for 22 off his first ball of the day.

Elgar batted for 434 minutes, faced 284 balls and hit 20 fours and a six.

SCOREBOARD

SOUTH AFRICA, first innings (overnight 266-8)

D. Elgar not out	141
A. Markram c Smith b Hazlewood	0
H. Amla c Cummins b Hazlewood	31
A. de Villiers c Warner b Cummins	64
F. du Plessis c Smith b Cummins	5
T. Bavuma c Smith b Cummins	1
Q. de Kock c Paine b Cummins	3
V. Philander c Paine b M. Marsh	8
K. Maharaj c Bancroft b Starc	3
K. Rabada c Smith b Lyon	22
M. Morkel c Smith b Lyon	4
Extras (b13, lb11, nb3, w2)	29
Total (97.5 overs)	311

Fall of wickets: 1-6 (Markram), 2-92 (Amla), 3-220 (De Villiers), 4-234 (Du Plessis), 5-236 (Bavuma), 6-242 (De Kock), 7-254 (Philander), 8-257 (Maharaj), 9-307 (Rabada), 10-311
Bowling: Starc 21-3-81-1 (2nb), Hazlewood 23-4-59-2, Lyon 19.5-6-43-2, Cummins 26-6-78-4 (1w), M. Marsh 7-2-26-1 (1nb, 1w), Smith 1-1-0-0

AUSTRALIA, first innings

C. Bancroft lbw b Philander	77
D. Warner b Rabada	30
U. Khawaja c Rabada b Morkel	5
S. Smith c Elgar b Morkel	5
S. Marsh c De Kock b Morkel	26
M. Marsh c De Kock b Philander	5
T. Paine not out	33
P. Cummins c De Villiers b Rabada	4
M. Starc c De Villiers b Rabada	2
N. Lyon c Elgar b Morkel	47
J. Hazlewood not out	1
Extras (b1, lb5, nb4)	10
Total (9 wkts, 67 overs)	245

Fall of wickets: 1-43 (Warner), 2-61 (Khawaja), 3-72 (Smith), 4-150 (S. Marsh), 5-150 (Bancroft), 6-156 (M. Marsh), 7-173 (Cummins), 8-175 (Starc), 9-241 (Lyon)
Bowling: Philander 15-5-26-2 (1nb), Rabada 19-1-81-3 (3nb), Morkel 20-6-87-4, Maharaj 12-3-35-0, Bavuma 1-0-10-0

Rashid on track to smash Starc's record

THE PENINSULA

HARARE: Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan is just one wicket away from becoming the fastest to take 100 One Dai International wickets. Rashid captured his 99th wicket in his 43th ODI yesterday against Ireland in the World Cup Qualifier in which he finished with 3-40.

Rashid, who is only 19 years old, will have the opportunity to break the record in the tournament final against West Indies tomorrow.

The current record holder, Australian pace ace Mitchell Starc achieved the landmark in his 52nd match, a game quicker than Saqlain Mushtaq, and two quicker than Shane Bond.

But if Rashid adds one more scalp during tomorrow's match in Harare, he will be smashing Starc's record by eight matches.

Queen Elizabeth to flag off London Marathon

REUTERS

LONDON: Britain's Queen Elizabeth will be the official starter of this year's London Marathon -- 30 miles away on a special rostrum in the grounds of Windsor Castle.

This year's London Marathon, which starts in Blackheath, will mark 110 years since the 1908 London Olympics when the marathon route went from Windsor to White City and used the now-standard 26.2 mile distance for the first time.

The first royal to start the London Marathon was Princess Diana in 1988 while last year the Queen's grandsons, Prince William and Prince Harry and the Duchess of Cambridge, acted as race starters for the event. There has never been a conclusive explanation as to why the 1908 race was run over 26.2 miles.

Historians suggest the extra 385 yards were included either to finish the race in front of the Royal Box at the White City stadium, or to start it in front of Windsor's Royal nursery.

Around 40,000 runners are expected on the start line this year on April 22.

Johnson crashes out at WGC Match Play

AFP

AUSTIN: World number one Dustin Johnson crashed out of the World golf Championships Dell Technologies Match Play on Thursday after suffering his second defeat of the tournament.

Defending champion Johnson, who suffered an upset loss to Bernd Wiesberger on Wednesday, was beaten 4&3 by Canada's Adam Hadwin at the Austin Country Club in Texas. The loss made it impossible for Johnson to progress from Group One in the round-robin phase for the weekend's knockout rounds, with Hadwin -- who halved his opening match with Kevin Kisner -- assured of finishing above the top seed.

Johnson trailed from the opening hole against 38th seed Hadwin, who set up a simple birdie chance after hitting his iron from the fairway to within four feet.

Johnson birdied the fifth to draw level but Hadwin edged back in front on the sixth after draining a 13-foot eagle putt on the 590-yard par-five.

The 30-year-old from Moose Jaw went two up at the turn with another superb putt, rolling in a 38-footer.

Johnson then found himself three down after three-putting on the par-three 11th, and his problems mounted on the 13th when his tee shot found the water hazard to help Hadwin go four up.

Hadwin sealed victory at the 15th when Johnson conceded.

A delighted Hadwin admitted he had expected a tougher challenge from Johnson.

"Obviously I really expected Dustin to play a lot better than he did, I think everybody did coming into this week," Hadwin said.

Elsewhere on Thursday, European Ryder Cup star Ian Poulter once again demonstrated his penchant for match play with his second win of the tournament, defeating 26th seed Daniel Berger 2 & 1.

Poulter, who is seeded 58th, has reverted to the putter that he used during Europe's "Miracle at Medinah" Ryder Cup win in 2012.

The Englishman is aiming for a high finish in Austin this week as he aims to snare a place in the Masters by breaking into the top 50 in the world.

Poulter, who defeated compatriot and ninth seed Tommy Fleetwood on Wednesday, will now face 33rd seed Kevin Chappell on Friday aiming to seal his place in the last 16.


Dustin Johnson of the United States reacts after being defeated by Adam Hadwin of Canada on Thurdsay.



Usain Bolt (left) takes part in a training session of Dortmund yesterday.

Upbeat Bolt 'serious' about becoming a top footballer

AFP

DORTMUND: Athletics legend Usain Bolt insists he is 'serious' about realising his dream of becoming a top-class footballer after training with Borussia Dortmund.

"I really want to try and make it professionally, to play at a high level," the sprint superstar told reporters yesterday at the German league club.

"My goal is to make a top team and play in one of the top leagues in the world."

Nearly 200 journalists and around 1,500 fans saw the eight-time Olympic gold medallist put through his paces with the first-team squad at Dortmund's training ground.

Having already trained with the team behind closed doors on Thursday, Yesterday's open session could be seen as a publicity stunt as both Bolt and Dortmund are sponsored by Puma.

The Bundesliga club live-streamed the training session and in China alone 1.2 million viewers tuned in.

The 31-year-old Bolt insists he is deadly serious about starting a new career – at an age when most footballers are hanging up their boots.

– 'Unfit' – Bolt, who retired from athletics last year, admits he lacks the endurance fitness football demands.

"Overall, I'd give myself a seven out of ten," he said.

"It was fun, the guys were cool and they were welcoming, but I can tell I was unfit.

"I like to play on the wing, right now I am unfit so I try to stay up top as a striker.

"I've heard a lot about the fans here – that really was an experience."

As expected, Bolt, the 100m and 200m world record holder, showed phenomenal pace over the turf.

He was proud of the header he scored in a practice game, but admits having much to learn.

"I'm tall, so it's one of the things I have practised over the years," he said of his header with sweat pouring down his face.

"I was working hard out there, I wanted to play my best, move and give the guys options."

Dortmund coach Peter Stoeger gave a realistic appraisal of Bolt as a footballer.

"He is talented, but if he wants to make it at the top level, there are still a few things to do," said the Austrian. "It's a big leap from athletics to football. "He's an unbelievably laid-back guy, an athlete with so much success, but with his feet very much on the ground.

"He had fun and he got some feedback, which was his wish.

"He understands the game, what he's missing is the team work and how to move." – Watching, learning – Bolt wants to be invited back to train again -- and maybe even sign -- with Dortmund.

"I hope to come again and hopefully they will welcome me, I can get better and (they'll) sign me -- you never know," he said.

The Jamaican refused to measure himself against Dortmund's professionals.

"I don't compare myself to them yet. I want to play at the level I know I can, to improve and to learn from them," he said.

"This is what they do for a living and I am trying to get into this by watching and learning." However, he was very clear that he does not want to play lower league football. Bolt dismissed even the suggestion of playing for Dortmund's reserves in Germany's third division to gain experience.

"I wouldn't want to play in a lesser league, I want to play in the top league – this is why I am here," he added.

"I would like to work with the team more and improve my skills, get better and try to play in the big league.

"I don't set any standards, I don't know where I am at.

"If it gets to the time where I feel like I am at the level, then the coaches or the club will say 'alright, you know what? You can play at this level or that level' "Until then, I am just going to working hard and pushing myself."

Bolt, a Manchester United fan, is already due to play at the club's iconic Old Trafford stadium in a charity football match on June 10.

Bolt will line up opposite British pop star Robbie Williams and captain the Soccer Aid World XI in a match to raise funds for the United Nations Children's Fund, Unicef.

> **I really want to try and make it professionally, to play at a high level. My goal is to make a top team and play in one of the top leagues in the world: Usain Bolt**

Galaxy confirm Ibrahimovic signing

AFP

LONDON: Zlatan Ibrahimovic says he is ready to win silverware with Los Angeles Galaxy after a full page advert in yesterday's *LA Times* confirmed his move to the MLS club from Manchester United.

The advert, in which Ibrahimovic was pictured in the white Galaxy kit, carried a message from the 36-year-old saying "Dear Los Angeles, you're welcome".

The Swedish striker left United on Thursday when the Premier League club agreed to terminate his contract.

"After being in Europe, winning 33 trophies, playing in the best teams in the world, playing with the best players in the world, I wanted to come to the US and play my game there," Ibrahimovic said in an interview in the *LA Times*.

"I wanted people to enjoy my game there and to win. And I chose the Galaxy to do that," he added.

Dan Beckerman, the president of entertainment giant AEG, the Galaxy's parent organisation, said Ibrahimovic would become one of the biggest stars in the Hollywood city.

"He's giving up a lot to come here," Beckerman told the LA Times. He's made it clear he's coming here to win championships. It's not about the money.

"LA is a place for stars, and he's going to be one of the brightest stars that's ever played in this market. In any sport."

Ibrahimovic, who scored 62 goals in 116 games for Sweden and won league titles in Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and France, is reported to have accepted $3m over two season to play for Galaxy, a huge wage cut from his United salary.

After a largely frustrating time at Old Trafford, where he was troubled by injuries and limited to only seven appearances this season, he said he was ready for action.

"I am ready to go now," Ibrahimovic said.

"First of all, I'm there to play football. I'm not there for something else. My first objective is to play football and do what I'm good at.

"I'm excited to come over and to get the experience with the Galaxy and to explore how the football is there. I want to be part of it and make it better."

> **I wanted people to enjoy my game there and to win. And I chose the Galaxy to do that: Zlatan Ibrahimovic**

Argentina to be 'Messi's team' at Cup, says Sampaoli

REUTERS

LONDON: Barcelona talisman Lionel Messi **(pictured below)** has the talent and maturity to carry Argentina's hopes of a successful World Cup campaign this year, the national team's manager Jorge Sampaoli has said.

Five-time *Ballon d'Or* winner Messi has led Barcelona to 30 domestic and European trophies during a stellar career but is yet to win a major trophy with the national team, apart from a gold medal at the 2008 Olympics.

Argentina finished runners-up to Germany at the 2014 World Cup and to Chile at the 2015 and 2016 Copa America tournaments, and Sampaoli believes that Messi can help the team go one step further and end their trophy drought in Russia.

"This is going to be his team," Sampaoli told a news conference on Thursday.

"He is the best of all and is in a stage of maturity that can he can carry the team on his shoulders. This is going to be his team." Messi, who is the all-time top goalscorer for both club and country, initially announced his retirement from international football after the loss to Chile in 2016 but the 30-year-old has since reversed his decision.

Meanwhile, Manchester City forward Sergio Aguero has been ruled out of Argentina's friendly against Italy at the Etihad Stadium on Friday due to a knee injury but could return for next week's trip to Spain.

Two-time winners Argentina open their World Cup campaign with a Group D encounter against Iceland on June 16, and will also face Croatia and Nigeria in the pool stage.



Azzurri shirt homage for late Astori

AFP

ROME: Italy will pay homage to the late defender Davide Astori with an inscription on the national team's shirt during friendly against Argentina, the Italian football federation (FIGC) announced.

"Davide, you're still with us. 13," reads the inscription to appear on Azzurri shirts for the match in Manchester against World Cup-bound Argentina.

The 31-year-old Astori, who had 14 caps for Italy and was captain of Fiorentina, died in the early hours of March 4 after suffering a suspected cardiac arrest in his hotel room prior to a game at Udinese.

The number 13 shirt Astori occasionally wore when playing for Italy will not be attributed during either Friday's match at the Etihad stadium, or Tuesday's friendly against England.

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Ageless Oksana defends Doha crown

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: At 42, she is as robust, brisk and energetic as any top young athlete. Oksana Chusovitana is a wonder of gymnastics world and in Doha she has made a habit of winning gold medals.

As the two-day finals of the FIG Artistic Individual World Cup begun yesterday, the Uzbek veteran stole the limelight in front of a packed crowd at Aspire Dome by defending her vault title, after an improved show than the last year.

In the 2017 edition, Oksana bagged 14.166 points to win the final and yesterday, the oldest among the Olympians in the sport, upped the ante to collect 14.433 to take gold medal.

She showed no signs that she is in the business for more than a quarter century, displaying flawless performance to outshine 17-year-old Pyon Rye Yong (PRK) who claimed the silver medal with 14.383 points. Coline Devillard of France took bronze medals after a tally of 13.949 points.

"It feels great to win in Doha. I love to be crowned here in front of these fans who like gymnastics," Oksana told reporters after the final, adding that she was looking forward to come back to Qatar, which will host the World Gymnastics Championships later this year.

"I am enjoying gymnastics and I am fit. Definitely, I will like to return to win more gold medals at my favourite venue. The organisation here is great," she added.

In other final featuring women gymnasts, Belgium's Derwael Nina put up a dominating performance for a gold medal in uneven bars. She looked in top form grabbing 15.300 showing top class skills. Russia's Uliana Perebinosova came second for a silver while French gymnast De Jesus dos Santos, who topped the qualifying round, had to content with a bronze medal.



The podium winners of the Women's Vault , champion Oksana Chusovitana of Uzbekistan (centre), silver medallist Pyon Rye Yong of North Korea (left) and bronze winner Coline Devillard of France pose for a photograph during the presentation ceremony yesterday. PICS: WASFY ABU SHOUSHA

It feels great to win in Doha. I love to be crowned here in front of these fans who like gymnastics: Oksana

Chinese gymnast Zou Jingyuan won the men's pommel horse title, finishing the competition with 15.100 points, ahead of Lee Chih Kai (Chinese Taipei) and Alec Yoder (USA) who took silver and bronze medals respectively.

Russia's Lankin Dmitrii reigned supreme in men's floor exercise final to win his maiden gold medal in the competition with 14.733 points. There were cheers for Filipino spectators too with Yulo Carlos Edriel displaying an impressive show to take silver medal. Japan's Kato Ryohei ended up with a bronze medal after accumulating 14.200 points.

In the last men's final of the day, Ukraine's Olympic medallist Igor Radivilov excelled to top the men's rings final, compiling 15.266 points. Promising Turkish gymnast Colak Ibrahim was close to the Ukrainian finishing his attempts collecting 15.000 points to win the silver medal. Jingyuan secured his second medal of the day by finishing third with 14.966 points.

Today, the last of four-day annual event, the finals of men's vault, parallel bars and horizontal bars will be held while women gymnasts will compete for gold medals in balance beam and floor exercise.

PODIUM WINNERS OF YESTERDAY'S FINALS

Men's Pommel Horse
Gold: Zou Jingyuan (CHN) 15.100
Silver: Lee Chih Kai (TPE) 14.800 1
Bronze: Alec Yoder (USA) 14.700

Men's Floor Exercise
Gold: Lankin Dmitrii (RUS) 14.733
Silver: Yulo Carlos Edriel (PHI) 14.433
Bronze: Kato Ryohei (JPN) 14.200

Men's Rings
Gold: Igor Radivilov (UKR) 15.266
Silver: Colak Ibrahim (TUR) 15.000
Bronze: Zou Jingyuan (CHN) 14.966

Women's Vault
Gold: Oksana Chusovitana (UZB) 14.433
Silver: Pyon Rye Yong (PRK) 14.383
Bronze: Coline Devillard (FRA) 13.949

Women's Uneven Bars
Gold: Derwael Nina (BEL) 15.300
Silver: Uliana Perebinosova (RUS) 14.566
Bronze: De Jesus dos Santos (FRA) 14.400



A Japanese gymnast in action during the Men's Pommel Horse event at the Aspire Dome during the FIG Artistic Individual World Cup finals yesterday.





International Friendly Championship: Qatar ready for Syria game

Qatar football players in action during a training session on the eve of their International Friendly Championship match against Syria in Basra, Iraq yesterday. RIGHT: Qatar head coach Felix Sanchez during yesterday's session.