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MANCHESTER CITY EXPERIENCE DOES NOT MATTER IN PREMIER LEAGUE TITLE RACE, SAYS MANAGER PEP GUARDIOLA



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SRI LANKA CLOSE ON VICTORY IN SECOND AND FINAL TEST AGAINST BANGLADESH IN CHITTAGONG



The Peninsula SPORT

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Al Rayyan set to host exciting Qatar Gold Sword and Qatar Gold Trophy races

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) is set to host exciting horse racing weekend to be culminated with back-to-back feature races on the Qatar Gold Sword and Trophy Day at Al Rayyan Racecourse tomorrow night.

The QREC yesterday reveled elite combinations, who will vie for top honours in the prestigious Qatar Gold Sword - Purebred Arabian (Class 1 Gr1) (Far Bend), and the Qatar Gold Trophy - Thoroughbred (4yo and up) (Class 1 QA-Gr1) (Far Bend) with both the international races carrying a prize money of $250,000 each.

Wathnan Racing-owned Abbes, trained by Alban Elie De Mieulle, will be competing to seal a hat-trick of Qatar Gold Sword titles after bagging victories in the last two seasons in the 2000m feature.

The seven-year-old, to be ridden by James Doyle, will face a tough challenge in the race as the likes of Al Wakrah, Eifrit and Alsaher are also among the 14 challengers vying for the coveted title.



Abbes in action during 2023 Qatar Gold Sword race at Al Rayyan Racecourse, in this file photo.

The 2200m contest for Qatar Gold Trophy is also expected to witness a thrilling battle with Abdulatif Hussain Al Emadi-owned Jewel House ready to defend the title.

A total of 18 horses will take part in the feature which will be the penultimate race of 41st Al Rayyan Meeting. Wathnan Racing's Bolthole, Toromona and Saqr are among the other competitors in the race.

The meeting will also witness the Qatar Silver Sword - Purebred Arabian (4yo only) (Class 1), Qatar Silver Trophy - Local Purebred Arabian (Class 1) and Al Wajba Trophy - Thoroughbred (3yo only) (Class 1) contests as eight races will take place tomorrow night.

Action will get underway tonight with the 40th Al Rayyan Meeting that will decide seven races including the feature Al Mamoura Cup - Local Thoroughbred Handicap 60-80 (Class 2).

Last year's winner of the race Ushayqer, owned by Mohamed Abdulla Al Abdulmalik, is also present in the line-up that has a total of eight runners.

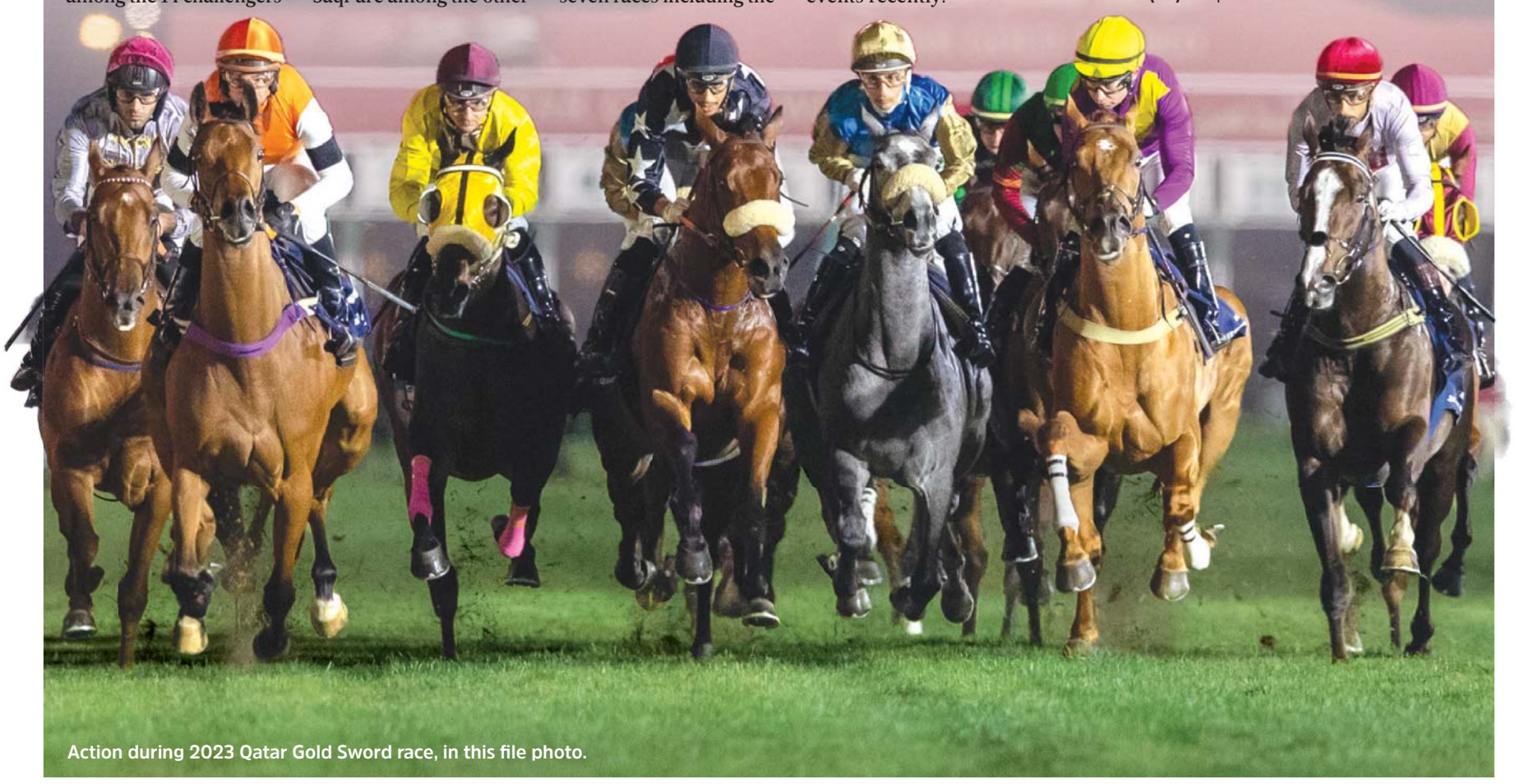
The Al Rayyan Racecourse will host a total of 47 meetings this season while Al Uqda Racecourse has already completed its scheduled 22 events recently.

QATAR GOLD SWORD - PUREBRED ARABIAN (Class 1 Gr1)

01: ABBES (FR) Owner: Wathnan Racing
02: ALSAHER (FR) H H Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Thani
03: BUCANERO (FR) Nasser Saif A R Al Kubaisi
04: DAWI (FR) H E Sheikha Iman M K Al Thani
05: EIFRIT (FR) Sh. Ahmad bin Mohamed F N Al Thani
06: GINKEAU (FR) Eng. Osama Omer E Al Dafea
07: JENKILLE HIPOLYTE (FR) Eng. Osama Omer E Al Dafea
08: METHGAL (FR) H E Sheikha Reem M K Al Thani
09: SAFI AL ZAMAN (FR) Sh. Ahmad bin Mohamed F N Al Thani
10: SHABAH (GB) Ahmed Abdullah Al Marzooqi
11: AL WAKRAH (FR) Al Shaqab Racing
12: MEDAN (FR) Hassan bin Ali Hassan Al Matwi
13: NAZWA (FR) H E Sheikha Yasmeen bint Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Thani
14: NO TEAR AL MAURY (FR) Khalifa bin Sheail KH J Al Kuwari

QATAR GOLD TROPHY - THOROUGHBRED (4yo+) (Class 1 QA-Gr1)

1. AEMILIANUS (GER) Owner: Sh. Mohammed Salman M Al Thani
2. BOLTHOLE (IRE) Wathnan Racing
3. COCO JACK (IRE) Yousuf Bakhit E B Al Kuwari
4. EMPEROR ZEN (IRE) 51 East Racing
5. HAMAKI (IRE) Wathnan Racing
6. HAUNTED DREAM (IRE) Wathnan Racing
7. JEWEL HOUSE (GB) Hussain Abdulatif Hussain Z AL Emadi
8. KING PACHA (IRE) Khalifa bin Sheail KH J Al Kuwari
9. MARASEEM (IRE) Al Wasmiyah Farm
10. NEW VARIANT (IRE) Khalifa bin Sheail KH J Al Kuwari
11. PAZEER (FR) Abdulatif Hussain M Z Al Emadi
12. PEDRO CARA (FR) Abdulaziz Ali A Al Kathiri
13. SALAHUDIN (FR) Al Shaqab Racing
14. SAQR (FR) Khalifa Bin Sheail KH J Al Kuwar
15. SEULOMONDE (GB) Nasser Saeed M S Al Eida
16. TOROMONA (IRE) Rashid Awajan K A Al Khayarin
17. STUDIO CITY (IRE) Al Shaqab Racing
18. EL CHACO (IRE) Sharq Stud



Action during 2023 Qatar Gold Sword race, in this file photo.

26th Gulf Cup rescheduled, to kick off on December 21

DOHA: Hosts Kuwait Football Association have announced that the 26th Gulf Cup Championship will be held from December 21, 2024 to January 3, 2025.

The federation stated that the Arab Gulf Cup Football Association (AGCFF) has decided to set the new dates instead of the earlier dates from December 13 to 26, 2024.

Including hosts Kuwait who have won the Gulf Cup a record 10 times, eight teams will participate in the tournament. Rest of the teams which will compete in the tournament are, holders Iraq, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Yemen.

The date for the draw of the tournament is also expected to announced soon. — *QNA*

CAS rejects IBA appeal to organise Olympic boxing

PARIS: The Court of Arbitration for Sport yesterday threw out an appeal from the International Boxing Association (IBA) after it was stripped of its rights to organise boxing events at the Paris Olympics.

The International Olympic Committee withdrew its recognition of boxing's governing body, the IBA, last year due to long-standing concerns over governance issues.

In its ruling explaining the decision to dismiss the IBA appeal, the CAS panel said the organisation "had not increased its financial transparency and sustainability".

CAS, which is sport's highest court, also said "the IBA had not changed its process relating to referees and judges to ensure its integrity", nor had it fully implemented other proposed reforms.

Instead, the IOC has put in place the Paris Boxing Unit to ensure qualification and hosting of the sport at the 2024 Paris Games.

Boxing has been part of every Olympics since 1920.

The IBA was suspended by the IOC in 2019 for multiple corruption scandals. — *AFP*

PSG coach Enrique 'very happy' with Mbappe ahead of French Cup semi

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique said yesterday he was "very happy" with star attacker Kylian Mbappe during a press conference on the eve of his side's French Cup semi-final clash with Rennes, as he downplayed rumours of a rift.

Following Mbappe's announcement to the club in February that he would leave Paris at the end of his contract this summer, the Frenchman has seen his playing minutes reduced and he looked visibly unhappy when substituted off with half an hour to play in PSG's 2-0 win at Marseille on Sunday.



Luis Enrique

Asked about Mbappe's attitude when leaving the pitch at the Velodrome, PSG's Spanish coach Luis Enrique said: "What's curious is everything that's being said based on a piece of false news.

"Someone has invented an insult (based on a lipreading of a video showing Mbappe as he made his way off the pitch) and then from that comes all kinds of speculations."

After the match, Mbappe posted a photo on Instagram of himself walking off the field under the rain, holding the captain's armband in his hand -- in the absence of Brazilian defender Marquinhos, the attacker was PSG's captain on the night.

"I'm taking it all in my stride. I'm very happy with all my players, Kylian included, he's always behaved admirably," said Luis Enrique at yesterday's press conference.

Today, PSG will welcome Rennes to the Parc des Princes where they are favourites to book a place in the French Cup final on May 25 in Lille.

The following Wednesday, Luis Enrique's former side Barcelona visit PSG for the first leg of their Champions League quarter-final tie. — *AFP*



Zaman, Becerra claim top honours at Khalifa Open

The second edition of Khalifa Open Squash Championship 2024 concluded with the participation of more than 120 players. Walid Zaman won the Professional category title after beating Youssef Essam in the final while Rafaela Becerra claimed women's title after a win over Parker Power in the title clash. Youssef Al Maliki (Men's 45-year-old category), Khaled Al Muhannadi (Boys U17), Talal Al Badr (Boys U15), Zoe Makarios (Girls U15), Hamad Al Khalaf (Boys U13) and Mohammed Al Tamimi (Boys U11) were the other title winners. Secretary General of the Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel and Badminton Federation Tariq Zainal and Tournament Director Saad Al Muhannadi awarded trophies to the winners. (QNA)


Pep Guardiola

City experience does not matter in title race: Guardiola

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola insists Manchester City's experience of thriving under the pressure of a title race will not be the decisive factor in who wins the Premier League.

Guardiola's men are aiming to become the first side to ever win four consecutive English top-flight titles and claim their sixth Premier League crown in seven seasons.

However, City will have to come from behind in the final nine games of the campaign after a 0-0 draw at home to Arsenal on Sunday left them still in third.

The defending champions trail leaders Liverpool by three points, with City one point behind second-placed Arsenal. The stalemate with the Gunners means City are still to beat one of the top five in the Premier League in six attempts this season.

And Guardiola stressed the need for his side to end that record when fourth-placed Aston Villa visit the Etihad Stadium today. "We have not many chances to drop points but there are still nine games (to go)," Guardiola said at his pre-match press conference.

"Our experience is over, it doesn't count. What counts is Aston Villa." City are unbeaten in 23 games, but their last defeat came away to Villa in December.

Guardiola labelled that 1-0 loss as City's worst performance of the season and knows he needs a reaction against a Villa side that have been transformed in 18 months under Unai Emery.

"Aston Villa are playing to qualify for the Champions League and every team is playing for something, so the last games will be difficult to manage for all of us," added Guardiola.

"It's excellent, the way they play. Unai Emery has consistency in every season. Villa have been impressive. It's not a surprise, the quality of him, his management and the quality of the team." John Stones could return to ease City's injury problems in defence, but Kyle Walker, Nathan Ake and goalkeeper Ederson remain out. — *AFP*

Arteta says Arsenal may need perfect run-in to win title

LONDON: Mikel Arteta said yesterday that Arsenal may have to win all of their nine remaining Premier League games if they are to be crowned champions as he prepares for the "most beautiful part of the season".

The second-placed Gunners are two points behind leaders Liverpool ahead of a busy April schedule following Sunday's gritty goalless draw at title rivals Manchester City.

Arteta, who is also preparing Arsenal for a Champions League quarter-final against Bayern Munich, urged his side to embrace the challenge, starting with today's game at home to relegation-threatened Luton.

"It's going to have to be really close to that," he told a pre-match press conference when asked if Arsenal need a 100 percent record from now on to finish top of the table.

"When you see the level and the consistency of the other teams and historically what is needed to win in this league, it's not going to be very far from that." The Spaniard added: "This is where we want to be and now we want to take this opportunity and make it happen.

"We worked every single day with that enthusiasm and passion to make it happen and enjoying the moment as well.

"I see the team really flowing and they are really excited about playing each game and that has to drive this energy until the end.

"I am full of energy and it's the most beautiful part of the season." Arsenal's fixture against Luton is the first of eight matches this month, including the two clashes with Bayern.

Although they will be huge favourites to beat Luton, they needed an injury-time winner to leave Kenilworth Road with a dramatic 4-3 victory in early December.

Asked about his memories of that game, Arteta said: "Especially how tough it was to win there, how difficult they have made it for every team...They deserve more credit than any other team in this league, how they've done it, what they transmit as a team and what they generated and it's going to be a really tough match." — *AFP*


Mikel Arteta


Sri Lanka's Vishwa Fernando (second left) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Bangladesh's Zakir Hasan (right) yesterday. AFP

Sri Lanka close on victory in second Bangladesh Test

CHITTAGONG: Prabath Jayasuriya, Lahiru Kumara and Kamindu Mendis each claimed two wickets as Sri Lanka came within grasp of another resounding victory in the second and final Test yesterday.

Bangladesh were 268-7 at stumps on the fourth day in Chittagong, still needing 243 runs for an improbable win.

Mehidy Hasan Miraz played an unbeaten knock of 44 to take the game into the fifth day with Taijul Islam accompanying him on 10.

Mominul Haque was the only other batsman to put up a fight, making 50 off 56 balls before he was dismissed by the spinner Jayasuriya in the last over before tea break.

Mominul denied that the team had lacked preparation.

"Playing domestic cricket and international Test matches is very different," he said.

Shakib Al Hasan and Liton Das put on 61 runs for the fifth wicket after Mominul's dismissal.

Off-spinner Kamundu broke the stand as Nishan Madushka took a brilliant reflex catch at silly point to dismiss Shakib for 36.

Liton got the bottom edge in an attempt for a pull shot off Kumara to depart three overs later for 38.

Kamindu broke another promising partnership of 46 runs between Mehidy and Shahadat Hossain, trapping the latter leg before for 15.

Mahmudul Hasan (24), fellow opener Zakir Hasan (19), and skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto (20) were all sent back cheaply.

Jayasuriya bowled Mahmudul to break the 37-run opening stand.

Zakir gave a catch to Dhananjaya de Silva off Vishwa Fernando at slip, and Lahiru clipped the bail of Najmul's off-stump.

Sri Lanka coach Chris Silverwood praised Bangladesh's fighting spirit.

"I think Bangladesh played well today. They put the pressure back on the bowlers, they made life difficult for us," he said.

"I think we bowled well in patches -- there were periods when we could have bowled better," he added.

"I don't think we quite had the consistency in this innings as we showed in the first innings with the ball, but thankfully our hard work has put us in a strong position".

Resuming on 102-6, Sri Lanka batted for a little over an hour to add 55 runs to their overnight score before declaring at 157-7.

Angelo Mathews, unbeaten on 39 overnight, top-scored with 56 runs. He was bowled by Shakib after making his 41st Test fifty.

Jayasuriya was unbeaten on 28 when the declaration came, along with Vishwa Fernando, who was eight not out.

Debutant pace bowler Hasan Mahmud finished with 4-65 for Bangladesh.

Sri Lanka were missing Dinesh Chandimal in the field after he returned home for a family emergency.

Sri Lanka, who have never lost a Test series to Bangladesh, thrashed the hosts by 328 runs in the first Test at Sylhet. — *AFP*

BRIEF SCORES

Bangladesh 178 and 268 for 7 (Mominul 50, Mehidy 44*, Kamindu 2-22, Kumara 2-41) **trail Sri Lanka** 531 and 157 for 7 dec (Mathews 56, Mahmud 4-65, Khaled 2-34) **by 242 runs**

Stokes rules himself out of England's T20 World Cup title defence

LONDON: Test captain Ben Stokes has ruled himself out of England's T20 World Cup title defence in the United States and the West Indies, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced yesterday.

The 32-year-old said he was missing the showpiece tournament in order to make sure he could be a fully-fledged all-rounder in Test cricket.

"Opting out of the IPL (Indian Premier League) and the (T20) World Cup will hopefully be a sacrifice that allows me to be the all-rounder I want to be for the foreseeable future," Stokes said in an ECB statement.

It is understood Stokes has not suffered any setbacks after briefly returning to bowling last month during a Test tour of India where England lost a five-match series 4-1.

There is no lingering discomfort in his left knee following surgery in November.

But although he has long been one of England's leading multi-format cricketers, Stokes has decided to prioritise his role as Test captain, in the hope of being able to play a full role with both bat and ball during six Tests -- three against the West Indies and three against Sri Lanka -- in the upcoming home season.

The first Test against the West Indies at Lord's starts on July 10, less than two weeks after the June 29 T20 World Cup final in Barbados.

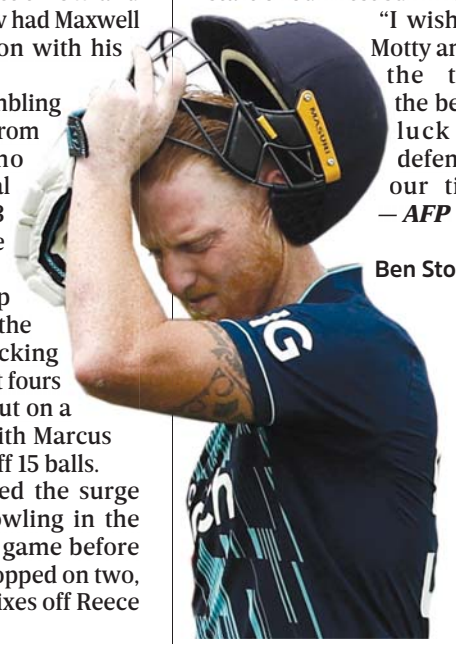
That congested Test schedule has prompted Stokes to follow up his withdrawal from the lucrative IPL T20 franchise tournament by also pulling out of the T20 World Cup in a major blow for England white-ball captain Jos Buttler and coach Matthew Mott.

"I'm working hard and focusing on building my bowling fitness back up to fulfil a full role as an all-rounder in all formats of cricket," Stokes said.

"Opting out of the IPL and the World Cup will hopefully be a sacrifice that allows me to be the all-rounder I want to be for the foreseeable future."

He added: "The recent Test tour of India highlighted how far behind I was from a bowling point of view after my knee surgery and nine months without bowling. I'm looking forward to playing for Durham in the County Championship before the start of our Test summer.

"I wish Jos, Motty and all the team the best of luck in defending our title." — *AFP*


Ben Stokes

Brighton post Premier League record profit of £122.8m

LONDON: Brighton posted a Premier League record £122.8m ($155m) profit after tax last season thanks to the club's best ever season on the pitch and a series of lucrative player sales.

The Seagulls qualified for Europe for the first time by finishing sixth in the Premier League and also reached the FA Cup semi-finals to help revenue rise to £204.5m.

That was despite losing manager Graham Potter to Chelsea, who also signed Marc Cucurella from Brighton for a reported £60m.

Yves Bissouma's move to Tottenham and Alexis Mac Allister's transfer to Liverpool contributed to Brighton's £144m gain on player sales.

The figures for the 12 months to June 30, 2023 do not include Moises Caicedo's British transfer record £115m move to Chelsea as it came after the accounting period. The club also announced yesterday highly-rated chief executive Paul Barber has signed a new contract until 2030.

"These accounts will of course catch the eye, because of the headline number," Barber said in a club statement.

"In a season when we made history on the pitch we took a huge step forward in terms of the club's long-held aim of becoming more sustainable and less reliant on (owner) Tony Bloom's incredibly generous levels of investment."

The interest free loan owed to boyhood Brighton fan and professional gambler Bloom, who also owns Belgian side Union Saint-Gilloise, has been reduced £406.5m to £373.3m.

Brighton boss Roberto De Zerbi has been linked with taking over at Liverpool and Bayern Munich next season.

But Barber said Brighton remain ambitious to get back into Europe and winning the club's first ever major trophy. Brighton sit ninth in the Premier League with nine games remaining this season. — *AFP*

'Bowling rockets': Yadav hits 156.7 km/h in Lucknow's victory at IPL

BENGALURU: Speedster Mayank Yadav bowled the quickest ball of the new IPL season at 156.7 km/h (97.4 mph) in a fiery spell to power Lucknow Super Giants to a 28-run win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru yesterday.

Lucknow rode Quinton de Kock's 56-ball 81 and an unbeaten 40 by Nicholas Pooran to post 181-5 at Bengaluru's M. Chinnaswamy Stadium.

New pace sensation Yadav then turned up the heat with his thunderbolts to return figures of 3-14, which included removing Glenn Maxwell for a duck and bowling Cameron Green for nine.

"Glad to have him in our team," De Kock said of Lucknow's pace ace.

"He is bowling rockets at the moment. He is keeping things simple. Youngsters bowling express pace can get caught up trying different things."

Bengaluru were bowled out for 153 and suffered their third loss in four matches this season. Lucknow won their second straight match after an opening defeat.

The 21-year-old Yadav surpassed his previous top speed, having sent down a ball at 155.8 km/h on his IPL debut in Lucknow's first win of the season on Saturday.

Shaun Tait bowled the IPL's fastest ever ball in 2011 at 157.71 km/h.

Delhi-born Yadav went to Lucknow for $24,000 ahead of the 2023 edition but was ruled out by an injury that cost him the entire season.


Lucknow Super Giants' Mayank Yadav bowls during match against Royal Challengers Bengaluru yesterday. AFP

He has set the tournament alight in his first two matches and ultimately dreams of representing his country.

"I feel very good, winning two player of the match awards, but I am happier that we won both the matches," he said.

"My aim is to play for India as much as possible. So I feel this is just the start and my main goal is what I am focused on."

Bengaluru lost the wickets of Virat Kohli, skipper Faf du Plessis and Maxwell in the space of nine deliveries and three runs.

Left-arm spinner Manimaran Siddharth, who came in as impact substitute in place of De Kock, got Kohli as his debut wicket as the star batsman miscued a shot to backward point and walked back after his 22 off 16 balls.

Du Plessis was run out in the next over off a direct throw and three balls later Yadav had Maxwell out caught at mid-on with his searing pace.

Wickets kept tumbling and despite cameos from Rajat Patidar, who made 29, and Mahipal Lomror, who hit 33 off 13, the chase ended tamely.

De Kock set up victory at the top of the order with an attacking knock featuring eight fours and five sixes, and put on a key 56-run stand with Marcus Stoinis, who hit 24 off 15 balls.

Bengaluru slowed the surge with disciplined bowling in the middle overs of the game before Pooran, who was dropped on two, hit back with three sixes off Reece Topley. — *AFP*