

What to WATCH

STAR SPORTS SELECT 2
English Premier League
Sheffield United v Newcastle
Live from 1:30am (Friday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
English Premier League
Arsenal v Brighton
Live from 2:15am (Friday)

FORMER ENGLAND CAPTAIN WILLIS NO MORE

Former England captain and fearsome pace bowler Bob Willis has died aged 70, his family announced on Wednesday. Willis, who captained his country between 1982 and 1984, played in 90 Test matches with his most memorable performance his eight for 43 in the third Ashes Test against Australia at Headingley in 1981. Star all-rounder Ian Botham would later describe his team-mate as a "tremendous trier, a great team man and an inspiration -- the only world-class fast bowler in my time as an England player". Willis -- who was diagnosed with prostate cancer three years ago -- finished his Test career with 325 wickets, which puts him fourth on the all-time list of England wicket-takers behind James Anderson, Stuart Broad and Botham. -- AFP



Manchester City striker Gabriel Jesus ended his eight-match drought as he found the back of the net twice in the reigning champions' 4-1 win over Burnley on Tuesday. PHOTO: TWITTER

Jesus finds shooting boots

AFP, Burnley

Gabriel Jesus scored twice as Manchester City showed no signs of giving up their Premier League title without a fight as a 4-1 victory at Burnley cut the gap on unbeaten leaders Liverpool to eight points. Pep Guardiola's men have struggled to match the standards they set in back-to-back title-winning seasons, but looked like their old selves in what could have been a tricky trip to Turf Moor. Jesus made the most of his chance to shine in the absence of the injured Sergio Agueiro with two brilliant finishes either side of half-

time to end an eight-game goal drought before long-range strikes from Rodrigo and Riyad Mahrez moved City above Leicester into second place on goal difference. "The strikers are there to score goals and we need him," said Guardiola of Jesus's importance with Agueiro also expected to miss Saturday's Manchester derby. "His effort, commitment is always there but strikers like him and Sergio live for the goal and it's important." Robbie Brady pulled a late goal back for Burnley, who remain 11th. The visitors were dominant from first minute to last and could have been far more convincing winners but for some wayward finishing

and Nick Pope's resistance in goal. "We played a good game, we controlled them and we didn't concede much apart from the goal in the last minutes," added Guardiola. "Our level was so good in most of the games. I don't have the feeling we played bad in certain games. In general, I'm more than satisfied with the level of the team." Jesus did not look like a striker searching for confidence as he opened the scoring with a sumptuous curling effort that found the far corner. Pope then stood up well to block with his feet from Raheem Sterling and Bernardo Silva to keep Burnley

in the game until the break. Jesus gave City a cushion five minutes into the second half with a thumping finish from Bernardo's inswinging cross. Rodrigo continued a night of fantastic finishes when he capped a brilliant individual display by drilling high past Pope 22 minutes from time. The Spanish midfielder insisted City would be ceaseless as they attempt to chase down Liverpool in the title race. "Until the maths say something else, we are not going to give up on anything. We are going to fight until the end," Rodrigo told Amazon.

Socceroos set up Argentina date

AFP, Cartagena



Australia will face Lionel Messi and Argentina in next year's Copa America after being drawn alongside the tournament co-hosts on Tuesday.

The Soccerroos, one of two guest teams invited to the South American football championship, will also face Paraguay, Bolivia, Uruguay and Chile in Group A. In Group B, Asian champions Qatar, the other guest nation, will face Colombia, Brazil, Venezuela, Ecuador and Peru, with all games taking place in Colombia. The first round designations for Australia and Qatar were the only major issue left to be decided at Tuesday's ceremonial draw. The other teams in the two groups had already been determined based on geographical proximity to co-hosts Argentina and Colombia, which are separated by some 4,350 miles. Australia coach Graham Arnold said his team was relishing the prospect of facing Argentina in Buenos Aires. "That's what it's all about, it's about testing ourselves at the highest level," Arnold said following the draw. "The players are so excited to have this great opportunity." The former international striker speaks from experience: Arnold was a member of the Soccerroos team which lost to a Diego

Maradona-inspired Argentina in a 1993 playoff for a spot in the 1994 World Cup. "In the old days in the 1990s we played Argentina and Maradona and if you speak to the players involved they'll tell you what a great experience it was," Arnold said. "Our boys haven't really had the experience of playing in South America. So to be able to play in those great stadiums in that environment is going to be a buzz." The 2020 Copa America marks the first time in modern history that the event is being co-hosted. Argentina and Colombia were chosen as hosts after CONMEBOL turned down an offer from the United States Soccer Federation to hold an expanded 16-team edition of the Copa America. The 2020 tournament will also see a change in format. At this year's Copa America, won by host nation Brazil, the 12 teams taking part in the event competed in three first round groups of four teams, with the top two in each group and the two best third placed teams advancing to the quarterfinals. Next year, the tournament will instead see two first round groups of six teams. The top four finishers in each group will qualify for the quarter-finals. Tournament co-hosts Argentina will kick off the tournament against bitter rivals Chile on June 12 in Buenos Aires.

GRUPO A		GRUPO B	
1	ARGENTINA	1	COLOMBIA
2	AUSTRALIA	2	BRASIL
3	BOLIVIA	3	QATAR
4	URUGUAY	4	VENEZUELA
5	CHILE	5	ECUADOR
6	PARAGUAY	6	PERU

See you in Italy, Ibra says

AFP, Turin

Sweden footballer Zlatan Ibrahimovic has fuelled speculation that he is set to return to Italy, where he has played for AC Milan, Inter Milan and Juventus, by saying in an interview: "see you soon in Italy". The 38-year-old striker confirmed his departure from Los Angeles Galaxy last month following the club's elimination from the Major League Soccer playoffs. "I'll join a club which must get back to winning, which must renew its history and is in search of a battle against everyone and everything," Ibrahimovic told GQ Italia. "That is the only way I'll be able to find the necessary motivation to surprise you again. "It's not just about choosing a team, as there are other factors that need to line up, including in the interests of my family. I'll see you in Italy soon." According to reports, Ibrahimovic has been offered a six-month deal to come to the aid of struggling former giants AC Milan, who are 11th in the Serie A table. Napoli are also a possible destination as last season's runners-up sit seventh, after a run of six league games without a win. "I love to make the difference," he added. "I don't just want to do one or two things well, I want to do all of it." Ibrahimovic played for two seasons between 2010 and 2012 with AC Milan, helping them to their last Serie A title, and scoring 42 goals in 61 league appearances. He also won three league titles with Inter Milan, and two with Juventus, which were both revoked following the 'Calciopoli' scandal.



FC Barcelona uploaded an album on its website, giving fans a behind the scenes peek at the Ballon d'Or gala on Monday. It shows Messi making his way to the event and, pictured here, celebrating with friends and family on the plane ride home. PHOTO: FC BARCELONA

VAR a mess, says Ceferin

AGENCIES, Basel

UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin has confessed that he isn't a fan of VAR, calling it "a mess". "It is a mess. I don't think the tolerance or one or two centimeters for offside, for example, is enough," he told The Mirror. "We will propose a change to IFAB. And also for our referees. "We don't have many interventions in UEFA competitions because our chief refereeing officer, Roberto Rosetti, said to the VAR: 'It has to be a clear and obvious mistake.' "But nowadays it's a different pressure. If you are the referee on the pitch, even though you have 70,000 or 80,000 people shouting it is you that has to decide -- not a person hidden somewhere in London, Berlin or somewhere else. "I'm not a fan. I was very sceptical, and I can say that I don't like the outcome. "Unfortunately, there's no way back anymore."

SHORT CORNER

Kohli back on top of Test rankings

Virat Kohli is back at the top of the batsmen's list in the ICC Test Player Rankings as Australia's Steve Smith slipped behind the India captain in the latest update carried out on Wednesday. Kohli, who had struck a fine 136 in the day-night Kolkata Test against Bangladesh last week to reach 928 points, is now five points clear as Smith's knock of 36 in the Adelaide Test against Pakistan saw him slip to 923 points from 931 before the match. -- Icc

Arthur set to become SL head coach

South African Mickey Arthur has been named Sri Lanka's head coach, replacing Chandika Hathurusingha, who was stripped of his coaching responsibilities following a disappointing World Cup, an official source said Wednesday. The 51-year-old takes over ahead of the two-match Test series against Pakistan later this month, the official said, adding that a formal announcement was expected shortly. Details of the two-year contract

were not immediately available, but three others are also due to join him in rebuilding the Sri Lankan coaching department, the source said. The others are Grant Flower as batting coach, David Saker in charge of bowling and Shane McDermott handling fielding. -- AFP

Real robbed Ronaldo of a Ballon d'Or, says Chiellini

Giorgio Chiellini claims Juventus teammate Cristiano Ronaldo "was robbed of the Ballon d'Or last year, as Real Madrid wanted to stop him winning." The trophy went to Real Madrid and Croatia midfielder Luka Modric in 2018, while this evening the winner was Barcelona star Lionel Messi. Ronaldo skipped the ceremony for two years running after learning he would not be holding the golden globe aloft. Asked about the decisions, Chiellini made some remarkable comments on Sky Sport Italia, saying: "Ronaldo was robbed of the Ballon d'Or last season, when Real Madrid decided to make sure he couldn't win it and that was really weird. "This season, it was more balanced. With all due respect, Modric even in his best season of his career didn't

deserve it. That was a signal from Real Madrid, as they wanted to stop Ronaldo winning it. "He won the Champions League, but by that logic, (Liverpool defender Virgil) Van Dijk should've won it this year, or last year (Antoine) Griezmann, (Paul) Pogba or (Kylian) Mbappe for doing extraordinary things at the World Cup. Modric made no sense." Cristiano Ronaldo won the Ballon d'Or on five occasions, while Messi now has six. -- AGENCIES

Windies rope in Desai as batting coach

Monty Desai, who was UAE's batting coach at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifiers 2019, will now join the West Indies team in a similar role on a two-year contract. Desai has held coaching roles with Afghanistan, Nepal, Canada, Indian regional teams and IPL teams Rajasthan Royals and Gujarat Lions in a career of over 12 years. He will now join the Kieron Pollard led-side ahead of the three-match T20I series against India, the first of which will be played at Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi Stadium on Friday. -- Icc

Commissions reach new heights

REUTERS, London

Spending on commissions to agents involved in the transfers has reached a record high of \$653.9 million this year, FIFA said in a report published Wednesday. FIFA said that 80% of the total -- which was already 19.3% more than during the whole of 2018 -- was paid by clubs from Italy, England, Germany, Portugal, Spain and France combined. FIFA is planning to place a cap on agents' fees as part of a wide-ranging reform to the transfer system. In October, the FIFA Council approved a proposal to limit the amounts to 10% of the transfer fee for agents of releasing clubs, 3% of the player's remuneration for player agents and 3% of the player's remuneration for agents of buying clubs.



David Warner (R) posted a photo alongside Brian Lara yesterday and, referring to his unbeaten 335 this week, captioned it: "Great to catch up with the legend himself. Maybe one day I will get another chance to knock 400 off." PHOTO: INSTAGRAM